

## **“Disciples Affirm Resurrection Hope” – Ephesians 1:11-19 – November 3, 2019**

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Today in the church we celebrate All Saints Sunday. All Saints Day falls on November 1 each year, the day after Halloween, or All Hallows Eve. Throughout the history of the church, the meaning of the word saint has evolved from referring to specific heroes and martyrs of the faith, to being an inclusive term for all those embracing Christian faith through belief in Jesus Christ. Additionally, the emphasis of All Saints Day has changed. During the Protestant Reformation, it became a day to remember and celebrate those loved ones in the faith who have died and passed on to life eternal.

The writer of the letter to the Ephesians, generally believed to be the Apostle Paul, used the word saint in reference to all people of faith – young and old, living and dead, near and far. Saints include those who make up the body of Christ on earth and are those through whom God work out God’s plan of redemption. We are the living saints. There are multitudes of saints who have gone before us, and there will be multitudes who come after us. In our baptisms we have been claimed by Christ and sealed as God’s own through the Holy Spirit. We have been grafted into the Body of Christ and have inherited the promised redemption of God.

There’s a whole lot of theological information in what I just said – and lots of churchy language. But what does it all mean? It means that we have been brought into the Church by God, and that the Church, even in all its failings and limitations, is an immense community that is not bound by the restrictions of time or space or mortality. It is huge, it is eternal. On this All Saints Sunday we are reminded of this, and we can wonder at the mystery of being part of something so much greater than ourselves, so much greater than we possibly hope to imagine.

The writer of Ephesians is aware of the difficulty of trying to imagine not only the immensity of Christ’s Body but also the hope of God’s glorious promises to which we have become heirs through Jesus Christ. Heirs and recipients of God’s promised redemption. It is something that cannot be fathomed by our limited senses. And so Paul prays for community in Ephesus, that God would give them wisdom and revelation so that come to know God. That they might see God, not with their physical eyes, but with the eyes of their hearts. With their inmost nature, they would come to know. And that knowing is what gives us hope.

What does it mean to see with the heart? To have hope in something unseen by human eyes? To trust in promises not yet fully realized? One commentator wrote, “To see with the heart is to imagine the future God is preparing.” (Robert Dunham, *Feasting on the Word*, year C, vol. 4, pg. 233) Our imagination enables us to see beyond our lived situation or

circumstance. Our brains have this amazing capacity to envision things beyond the here and now. And in community, that imagining, that hope is reinforced. Because, in our shared hope in God's plan to make all things new, we can envision something more, something better. And that hope sustains us.

We might ask why community is so important for sustaining that hope? Writer Heidi Neumark shared this old tale – a disciple asked his rabbi to explain the meaning of community. It was evening and they were sitting around a fire. The rabbi did not answer, but sat in silence, watching as the fire died down. When it was no more than a pile of glowing coals, the rabbi took one coal out from the fire and set it apart on the stone hearth. Its fire and warmth soon died out. (*Breathing Space*, 1994, p. 61)

We need one another. The church is the community of saints, and in Christ, we have a shared hope, a shared vision of something more, God's promises fully revealed. In the church, we have people who support us, encourage us, stand beside us in the mission work of the church, comfort us in our losses, celebrate with us in our joys. The community of the faithful, helps us to hold onto the vision of God's future, it reminds us to see with our hearts, not with our eyes. Because our eyes can deceive us. We get disheartened by the pain we see in us and around us. The troubles of this world can be overwhelming. The task of the church seems daunting, especially when the church gets off track.

But the work we do, here and now, is an important part of much larger work in progress. As we live out our lives in obedience to Jesus Christ, we stand on the shoulders of those saints who came before us, and we set the stage for those saints who will come after us. Our hope is not based on the realities of what we see now - our world's corruption, poverty and injustices – our hope is based on the power of God, who is carrying out a plan of redemption that will one day be fully realized.

Friends, we are part of the community of saints – we are the faithful people who follow God, trust in the promises of God, hope in the resurrection of Christ, and we wait for the renewal of all things. Indeed we are human, and we make mistakes, and we doubt, but let us remember this day, at this time, that we have been claimed by God, and when we look not with our eyes but with our hearts, may we understand the mystery of being a part of something eternal.