

Celebrating All Saints Day

Resources for Congregational Ministry and Worship

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CHRISTIAN CHURCH FOUNDATION

Helping Disciples Make a Difference

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND RESOURCES	PAGE
A Congregational Ministry	1
Pastoral Ministry: Care for those who grieve the Saints	
Educational Ministry: Remembering the Saints	
Financial Stewardship Ministry: Gifts by and for the Saints	
Historical Background	2
Biblical Background	3
MINISTRY PLAN RESOURCES	5
Advance Letter	
Personal Contact	
Worship Script	
Bulletin Insert	
Follow-up Resources	
WORSHIP RESOURCES	11
Lectionary Scriptures	
Hymns	13
Calls to Worship	15
Children's Sermon	17
Prayers	18
Litanies	19
Invitations to Communion	22
Benedictions	22
Sermons	23

ALL SAINTS DAY

Resources For Congregational Ministry And Worship

Congregational ministry on the day we remember those
who from their labors rest

All Saints Day is held on November 1 each year. Some congregations schedule it for the first Sunday of November or on the last Sunday of October depending on congregational schedules.

Some congregations hold a special All Saints Day service on a weekday or Sunday evening. Many congregations include All Saints Day as part of the Sunday morning service. In these services congregations can remember members of the congregation who have died during the past year. Some congregations include the names of those who were remembered with a Memorial Fund gift during the year.

All Saints Day provides a congregation an opportunity to extend its ministry in three important ways:

Pastoral Ministry: Care for those who grieve the Saints

Each year All Saints Day provides an opportunity to reach out to persons who grieve the death of a loved one. A letter sent in October can express concern for those who grieve and invite them to attend an upcoming worship service at which time the deceased will be remembered. Information on the grieving process can be included. Those to whom a letter has been sent can then be contacted by phone or in person by a pastor, Elder, or Deacon to reinforce the invitation and to inquire as to the person's well-being. A short training session on listening and grieving could be provided by the pastor for those making contact.

Educational Ministry: Remembering the Saints

In addition to naming those who have died during the past year, a congregation can use this special service as an opportunity to lift up Saints from the history of the church, congregation or denomination. Information can be included in bulletins, newsletters and websites. In the sermon, the preacher can lift up those who influenced the congregation's life. Examples: the story of an organizing pastor or an active lay leader who influenced the direction of the congregation, or a person who served the congregation in the denomination or community.

Financial Stewardship Ministry: Gifts by and for the Saints

All Saints Day provides a congregation the opportunity to lift up special financial resources made possible by the Saints. Most congregations have Memorial Funds to which gifts are given at the time of a person's death. On All Saints Day, a congregation can give thanks for this fund and report, verbally and/or in a bulletin insert, projects accomplished by this fund and project needs of the congregation. Also, congregation's that have permanent funds, a Bequest Receipt Policy or a Planned Giving Ministry can make this part of the worship resources and or promotion.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

All Saints Day grew out of the early church's practice of remembering the martyrs of the church. Special days to recognize Saints developed over time. By the late 300s general observance of a day to honor all Saints was in place. In the 400s such a day was often held on the Sunday after Pentecost. By the mid 700s, All Saints Day became connected with November 1. In time All Souls Day was celebrated on November 2 in order to recognize the faithful who had died but did not have the distinctive title, "Saint."

With the coming of the Protestant Reformation, many reformers had grown uncomfortable, not so much with All Saints Day but with their perception of the way Saints were venerated. It seemed to many that the Saints were worshipped in place of God. Lutherans and Anglicans held on to the celebration of All Saints Day; seeking to refocus the worship toward God.

Early leaders of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) concerned with "*restoring the New Testament Church*" and with "*Bible names for Bible things*" would have found little justification for All Saints Day. Only in the past 30 years have Disciples found a place for All Saints Day in congregational life compelled by the opportunity to enhance the ministry of the church.

Halloween and All Saints Day have a confused connection. Suffice it to say that the end of October was a special time in pre-Christian religious understanding. Halloween literally is *The Evening before All Hollows Day* or All Saints Day; the day on which all the Saints are hallowed. In some Christian traditions, a vigil of prayer is conducted on All Hollow's Eve to prepare for All Saints Day. Thus, the Christian who is focused on God can enjoy Halloween's fall fun as an occasion to celebrate that in Christ the "devil" is ultimately defeated.

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

In general, the Biblical terms translated as saint or saints do not refer to superior examples of faithful individuals as much as they do to those who are the people of God. In the Hebrew Scriptures the word generally refers to the covenant people of Israel. In the New Testament, the reference is to the followers of Jesus, the church.

The Hebrew and Greek words translated "Saints" have to do with those who are set apart. Set apart not by the individual's goodness but by God's calling and goodness. In the Hebrew Scriptures the word "saint/saints" appears in the KJV 61 times. In the NRSV it is the chosen word for translation only once, Psalm 31:23. In the Old Testament the NRSV uses the words Holy Ones or Faithful in place of saints. In the Greek Scriptures the word "saint/saints" appears in the KJV 61 times, and equally in the NRSV.

Other translations use, instead of saints, the words: the set apart, the church (Peterson-The Message); faithful people, God's people (Today's English Version)

The Harper Bible Dictionary (cc 1985) identifies two different Hebrew terms which are often translated as saints: One is from the word for "covenant faithfulness" and refers to those who are bound closely to God in love. Psalm 32:23 "Love the Lord all you his saints. The Lord preserves the faithful..." (NRSV) The second is from the word for "holy" and refers to those set apart and dedicated to the service of God. Daniel 7:27 "And the Kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most high..." (KJV)

In the New Testament, the word saints translates the Greek term for "holy ones" where it distinguishes Christians from non-Christians. A good example is, "Do you not know that all the saints will judge the world?" (I Corinthians 6:2-NRSV)

The word "saints" appears only once in the Gospels:
"The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised."
Matthew 27:52

In Acts and Paul's letters the word usually speaks of Christians in a particular place such as "in Rome who are called to be saints" Romans 1:7; or "to the saints who are in Ephesus" Ephesians 1:1. It is essentially a reference to the "church folks."

Romans 16:1-2 is an example of the word being used to refer to the whole church, not just a particular "congregation". "I commend to you our sister Phoebe...; that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints..."

This broader use of the term is reflected in the non-Pauline writings for example: "For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do." or..."I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." (Jude 3)

The book of Revelation uses the term to refer to those who have been martyrs, which ties in with

the history of the church that evolved from days honoring martyrs to special days honoring saints. “You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nation.” (Revelation 5:9) In this verse four living creatures sing to the Lamb a song praising the Lamb’s martyrdom for those ransomed or set apart from among all peoples; that is the “saints.”

“And I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of the witnesses to them.” (Revelation 17:6) Here the saints are identified as martyrs. However, it is not martyrdom that makes them saints but being saints, part of the church, or followers of Christ that called forth their suffering.

In the Bible to be called a “Saint” refers not to a special Christian; rather it identifies those who refer to Jesus as special; that is, those who call Jesus the Christ, are called saints. Those who claim Jesus as God’s way for the world are those who are set apart to live the Jesus way. We become saints not because of our goodness but because of God’s goodness. We are set apart as followers of Christ because of God’s action seen and understood and claimed in Christ.

On All Saints Day in a local congregation we may well name as a Saint someone who is widely known to have been less than an exemplary Christian. But don’t we all fall short of the glory of God? Paul called the church in Corinth Saints. He also calls them sexually immoral and lots of other negative things. They were not Saints because they lived holy lives but because Jesus gave his whole life for them.

MINISTRY PLANNING RESOURCES

Advance Letter

Two weeks prior to All Saints Day, send a letter to families of those who will be recognized: family members of those who have died in the past year; family members of those who have been honored with Memorial Gifts, family members who have been part of creating the congregation’s permanent Endowment Funds

Advance letter example

date

name

address

city, state, zip

Dear _____,

On Sunday, _____date_____, during both our 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. services, we will be celebrating All Saints Day. This Sunday closest to November 1 is an occasion to remember those in the Christian faith who have died in the Lord.

During worship we will be remembering those of our congregation who have died since All Saints Day 20___. We will also recognize those honored with memorial gifts in the last year.

_____name_____ will be named and honored in prayer. We thought you would want to know of this part of our congregational life. When names are read, family members will be asked to stand. We would be pleased if you or someone in your family is able to be present. Please call the church office, 123-4567 to let us know if someone will be able to represent your family.

We hope that you will be able to be with us on _____date_____. (We also will be dedicating gifts made possible through Memorial Gifts.) Please invite other members of your family to this special day.

In Christian Service,

Memorial Chairperson

Worship Script

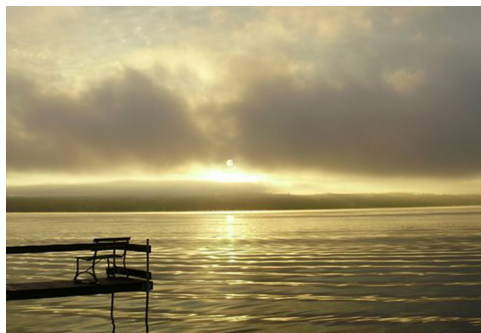
On All Saints Day, include in worship:

Pastor: Today during worship we remember the Saints of this congregation in several ways. One way the Saints continue to serve us is through Memorial Funds and Perpetual Funds. The Chair of our Board, Jane Doe, comes now to acknowledge these important gifts.

Board Chair: The Memorial Fund exists as a way for people to honor friends and family through a financial gift. Often at the time of a death gifts are received. The congregation acknowledges the gift to the donor and informs the family that a gift has been made. These gifts are used in a variety of ways to enhance the ministry of this congregation at the discretion of the Memorial Funds Committee. This year the Memorial Fund enhanced our ministry in the following ways....(list projects accomplished.)

Endowment Funds also serve as tributes to the Saints. Endowment Funds are invested and the income distributed according to the guidelines of the congregation's Endowment Funds Policy. Endowment Funds ordinarily are received by bequests and other planned giving opportunities. Our funds are invested through The Christian Church Foundation a mission agency of The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). If you would like to learn more about this form of giving, please speak to me or to our pastor. We give God thanks for the many ways in which the Saints of this congregation have blessed us.

*Pastor: Will you join me now in The Litany of the Saints printed in your bulletin.
(See worship resources.)*



Bulletin Insert

Sample materials for inclusion in bulletin for All Saints Day identifying saints and related programs such as Memorial Funds and Endowment Funds.

Side 1:

For All the Saints
Church Name and Date



Remembering members of our congregation who have died since All Saints Day last year and loved ones honored with Memorial Gifts this year.

(List Names)

*“For all the saints, who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia! Alleluia!”*

Bulletin Insert

Side 2:

REMEMBERING THE SAINTS
Faithful People Christian Church
Sunday Worship This Year 11:00 a.m.

In church tradition, November 1 has been called “All Saints Day.” On the first Sunday of November this congregation honors its Saints who have died in the past year, and those honored with memorial gifts. We also celebrate the congregation’s Memorial Fund and Perpetual Funds and dedicate the projects made possible by these resources.

The Memorial Fund is a way in which persons can honor friends and family at the time of death. Many choose the Memorial Fund in lieu of flowers. Such gifts are added to “The Memorial Fund” and used for special congregational projects as needs arise. Gifts received are acknowledged to the donor and the names of those who donate are reported to the family of the person honored.

In the past year the Memorial fund held with three important improvements:

New furniture in the first floor entrance
New Chairs and New Tables in Fellowship Hall.
Adult Baptismal Robes

The Endowment Funds is a growing resource that enhances and extends the ministry of our congregation. Funds received for the Endowment Fund are invested and income is used annually. The funds are invested through The Christian Church Foundation. In the past year the perpetual funds were increased through a bequest from the estate of Jane Doe.

In the past year

The Building Fund defrayed costs to improvements in Fellowship Hall.
The Scholarship Fund provided aid to four college students.
The Outreach Fund made gifts to a local Senior Adult Ministry, a food bank and a global mission project in India upon the recommendation of The Outreach Ministry to the Board
The Mission and Ministry Fund was established this past year with a designated gift in honor of Jane and John Doe. Annual income will be used to expand our congregation’s ministry upon approval of the Board.

It is hoped that others will contribute to the Endowment Funds through gifts, bequests and other planned giving programs. If you have questions about these ministries, please speak to the (Name) chair of the Endowment Fund Committee or our pastor.

Follow-up communication

The week after the service send a letter to family members not present with a copy of the worship bulletin and a Memorial Fund giving envelope. Follow-up by traditional mail may be expensive but it provides a more personal touch in this day and age.

Follow-up letter example

Dear,

It was good to remember the Saints of our congregation last week. When names of loved ones were read a moment of silence followed.

A copy of the Sunday Worship Bulletin and insert is enclosed. We also include a Memorial Fund envelope and a copy of our Endowment Fund policy for your consideration

Please know that our pastors and Elders remain available to you in these continued days of grieving.

In Christ,

A fourth help is prayer. Not just praying to God to give you strength but also prayer that waits for God’s strength. Perhaps sit down with a favorite Psalm or other Scripture, and read it slowly allowing God to speak to you.

I do not think that you can avoid sadness in this season, but I do think that with God’s help you will become stronger. A woman who had recently lost her husband wrote one year in a Christmas card: “My friends say to me, ‘This Christmas is going to be hard for you,’ probably it will be but without Christmas (God coming to us) my life would be impossible.”

I pray “Emmanuel, God with us” for you this Christmas. If I or one of our Elders can be of any pastoral assistance to you, please call upon us.

Sincerely,

Pastor

Holiday Season Letter

The Monday after Thanksgiving send this letter to families of person who died in the past year.

Example

Dear,

I am writing to you as one who has experienced the death of a loved one during the past year. The first holiday season since that death can be especially difficult. If you find yourself feeling renewed sadness at this time of year, then you are normal. Grieving is a long-term process. Each holiday tradition may trigger memories of your loved one. These memories can be both sad and a source of strength.

Sometimes the temptation exists to withdraw into one's sadness and memories. Some people avoid family gatherings, sleep more, and find it difficult to make decisions. Sometimes people react in an opposite way. They become more active, try to function on less sleep and are always on the go. This may be a sign of avoiding the feelings.

If you are experiencing renewed grief this season, there are several things you can do.

First, acknowledge the feelings and accept them as normal. Once you accept the feelings you can move on from there.

Secondly, sit down and feel the emotions for awhile. Don't fight the tears; they are a gift from God that help to wash away sadness.

Thirdly, you might find it helpful to share these feelings with another person. Don't be afraid to open up and talk.

A fourth help is prayer. Not just praying to God to give you strength but also prayer that waits for God's strength. Perhaps sit down with a favorite Psalm or other Scripture, and read it slowly allowing God to speak to you.

I do not think that you can avoid sadness in this season, but I do think that with God's help you will become stronger. A woman who had recently lost her husband wrote one year in a Christmas card: "My friends say to me, 'This Christmas is going to be hard for you,' probably it will be but without Christmas (God coming to us) my life would be impossible."

I pray "Emmanuel, God with us" for you this Christmas. If I or one of our Elders can be of any pastoral assistance to you, please call upon us.

Sincerely,

Pastor

WORSHIP RESOURCES

Following are resources for use in worship. They have been gathered from a variety of places. If the creator of these resources is not acknowledged it is due to lack of information. Some have been adapted in various ways from original resources. If you think you are one of the original authors of these materials then please give thanks to God for your contribution to enabling others to worship well.

One of the first things to be decided is whether or not the entire worship service is going to focus on All Saints Day or whether only portion. Sometimes the sermon can focus on the theme sometimes only a reference or illustration.

Worship leaders are to feel free to use and adapt these resources as fits the worship setting. See also, Chalice Worship, pp 180-182.

Lectionary Scriptures

For lectionary readings, visit www.lectionary.library.vanderbilt.edu or www.disciples.org.

Year A

Revelation 7:9-17

Psalm 34:1-10, 22

I John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12

Matthew 5:1-12

The Year A lectionary texts minister to a congregation by confronting the reality of suffering even the suffering of the saints.

- The Book of Revelation tells of "these are they who have come out of the great ordeal" and assures that "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."
- The Psalmist speaks: "This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble."
- I John encourages saying, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is."
- Matthew celebrates saying "Blessed are those"... even those "who are persecuted" on account of Jesus.

Year B

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9 or Isaiah 25:6-9

Psalm 24

Revelation 21:1-6a

John 11:32-44

The Year B lectionary encourages congregations to be faithful saints as it provides hope for the eventual vindication of God for the saints.

- The Wisdom of Solomon says: "the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his elect, and he watches over his holy ones."
- Isaiah says: "Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth."
- The Psalmist proclaims: "They will receive blessing from the LORD, and vindication from the God of

their salvation.”

- Revelation echoing Isaiah declares: “he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”
- John’s story of the raising of Lazarus assures us: “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”

Year C

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18

Psalm 149

Ephesians 1:11-23

Luke 6:20-31

In Year C the lectionary tells a congregation that the life of being a saint is a blessing in itself:

- Daniel says: “the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever--forever and ever.”
- The Psalmist assures that: “the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with victory.”
- The letter to Ephesus proclaims: “with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.”
- Luke describes the counterintuitive blessing: “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Hymns

Music will be part of the worship experience. Hymn selection will vary depending on the focus of the service and sermon.

General Theme

For All the Saints

637 Chalice Hymnal

Give Thanks for Life

649 Chalice Hymnal

Some There Are Who by Their Living

648 Chalice Hymnal

When the Saints Come Marching In

Search on line for lyrics

Hymns of Grief and Comfort

For many All Saints Day will be a day of renewed sadness as loved ones are named and remembered.

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

643 Chalice Hymnal

This African American spiritual affirms that there are times when we are up and times when we are down but that our soul is still “heavenly bound”.

Abide With Me

636 Chalice Hymnal

This hymn of reassurance is a prayer asking for God’s abiding presence.

Where the Spirit of the Lord Is

264 Chalice Hymnal

There is comfort in life’s darkest hour proclaims this chorus in words and mood.

Communion Hymns

When You Do This, Remember Me

400 Chalice Hymnal

This hymn, based on words of Alexander Campbell, emphasizes the All Saints Day theme that Saints are all those in God’s family who remember Jesus.

Lift Your Hearts (Lyrics: Richard J. Hull II)

Tune: Come Christians, Join to Sing

Come, lift your hearts this day, Alleluia! Amen!

We lift them and we pray, Alleluia, Amen!

Let’s give God thanks and praise

God’s with us all our days

This grateful song we raise, Alleluia! Amen!

Eat now the Bread of Christ, Alleluia! Amen!

Drink now the sacrifice, Alleluia! Amen!

This do in memory

Of Christ upon the tree

Alive with you and me, Alleluia! Amen

A Love Hymn (Lyrics: Richard J. Hull II)

Tune Hymn of Joy

God embrace us, don't disgrace us
Lift us up and give us joy,
Bring us forth to give you pleasure
In this world and evermore.
Your caresses, our successes
Join as one in loving praise
You fulfill us, over through us,
In mysterious loving ways.

At the table we are thankful.
Lifting up our hearts to you!
It is right to sing your praises
Who in Christ has made us new!
Bread is blessed here, cup consecrated,
They present the living One.
Broken, shed and shared together
Spirit's work is never done.

Sing a song God, don't prolong God
Celebrate, affirm this day.
As we court you, tease, exhort you
Hear the tune we seek to pray:
We're together, each one's treasure
Sharing love and having fun.
Now we act in deep compassion
For the world you make as one



Hymns of Challenge and Discipleship

All Saints Day will also be a call to renewed servanthood and perhaps financial stewardship, following in the way of the Saints who have been honored. These hymns can serve such an emphasis.

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me 614 Chalice Hymnal
The word "live" can be changed to numerous verbs appropriate to the day.

Living for Jesus 610 Chalice Hymnal
This classic gospel hymn "constrains us to answer his call."

Jesu, Jesu 600 Chalice Hymnal
This hymn from Ghana calls us to love our neighbors

Rise Up, O Saints of God! 611 Chalice Hymnal
This song works not only because of the word "Saint" in the title but because of its call to the congregation to be faithful.

Calls To Worship

Based on All Saints Day Lectionary Psalms

Year A Based on Psalm 34:1-8, 22

L: I will bless the HOLY ONE at all times;
God's praise shall continually be in my mouth.
The HOLY ONE redeems the life of the faithful servants;
none of those who take refuge in God will be condemned.

R: My soul makes its boast in the HOLY ONE; let the humble hear and be glad.
O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt God's name together.

L: I sought the HOLY ONE who answered me, and delivered me from all my fears.
Look to God, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed.

R: My soul makes its boast in the HOLY ONE; let the humble hear and be glad.
O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt God's name together.

L: O taste and see that the HOLY ONE is good; happy are those who take refuge in God.
O fear the HOLY ONE, you God's holy ones, for those who fear God have no want.

R: My soul makes its boast in the HOLY ONE; let the humble hear and be glad.
O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt God's name together

Year B Based on Psalm 24

L: Who shall ascend the hill of the HOLY ONE? And who shall stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.

R: The earth is the HOLY ONE'S and all that is in it,
the world, and those who dwell therein;
for God has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.
Glory to God.

L: Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors!
that the King of glory may come in.
Who is the Sovereign of glory? The HOLY ONE, strong and mighty,

R: The earth is the HOLY ONE'S and all that is in it,
the world, and those who dwell therein;
for God has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.
Glory to God.

Year C Based On Psalm 149

L: Let God's people be glad in their Maker; let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.
Let us praise God with dancing,
and making melody to the HOLY ONE with tambourine and lyre.

R: We praise the HOLY ONE! We sing to HOLY ONE a new song,
We Give God praise in the assembly of the faithful.

L: HOLY BEING takes pleasure in the people; God adorns the humble with victory.
Let the faithful exult in glory; let them sing for joy from their seats of honor.

R: We praise the the HOLY ONE! We sing to HOLY ONE a new song,
We give God praise in the assembly of the faithful.

L: Let the high praises of God be in our throats.
This is glory for all God's faithful ones. Praise the LORD!

R: We Praise the HOLY ONE! We Sing to HOLY ONE a new song,
We Give God praise in the assembly of the faithful.

General Call To Worship

God's people are gathered, we join with the Saints of all the ages in giving glory to our God. Let us join our hearts, souls, strength and minds as one as we give praise to the God of all creation, the God we have come to know in Jesus Christ.

Responsive Call to Worship

West Street Christian Church, (Disciples of Christ)Tipton, IN, Nov. 7, 1993

L: Come, saints of God, to a new heaven and earth,
To the holy city, God's new Jerusalem,

R: The dwelling place of God is with humanity:
God wipes away the tears from our eyes.

L: The earth is God's and the fullness thereof,
The words and all who dwell therein.

R: Who shall ascend the hill of God,
And who shall stand in God's holy place?

L: All whose hands are clean and hearts pure
Shall know God's vindication and blessing.

R: We give thanks to God, who has qualified us
To share the inheritance of the saints.



Children's Sermon

Saint Children (Matthew 18:3)

Richard J. Hull II

Good morning. I am glad again that we have some time together. Today is a special day in our church. Of course every day is special when we can be together. But some days are more special than others. Christmas is a special day at church. Easter is a special day at church. Today is called All Saints Day. Can you say that with me? All Saints Day.

Did you know that you are a saint? A saint, in the Bible is what people in the church called each other. "I am a saint, you are a saint, we are all saints together." Saints in the Bible are those who seek to follow Jesus. So, you see, I think you must be a saint because I know you try to follow Jesus: loving God, neighbor and even your enemies.

But sometimes you will hear somebody called "Saint So and So." Like the city near us, St. Augustine, it is named after one the saints in the church who lived a long time ago and he provided us a lot of help in talking about God and Jesus and church. Or maybe you have friends who go the St. Matthew's Church. It is named after one of Jesus' disciples named Matthew. Sometimes famous people who did wonderful things get called saints.

And sometimes at church you might hear someone talk about someone who died. They might say, "He was a real saint"; or "She was such a saint." This is a way of remembering someone that we really liked who followed Jesus.

Today we are remembering some saints in our church. We are remembering people who died in the last year. Do you ever know anyone who has died? Maybe a grandparent, or a neighbor? Some you may remember (name) who died a few months ago. I know (name) always liked to see the children. (name) thought you were saints.

When someone dies we usually feel sad. Sometimes we cry. Maybe you have seen your parents cry when someone died. We cry because we loved those who died. And because they were saints, because they tried to follow Jesus and helped us to follow Jesus we do things to honor them. We have a special worship service called a funeral or memorial service. Sometimes we give special gifts in their honor to the church or some other program. And today, we will remember them by reading their names in worship. See this paper, from the bulletin? Their names are listed there.

When I remember the saints I remember the ways they showed me how to follow Jesus and I give thanks. And I give thanks every week for the ways you show me how to follow Jesus. You are Jesus saints, yes children are Jesus saints, and Jesus knew you would be and he told adults, "become like children to enter God's kingdom."

Saint Children, please pray with me.

Prayers

Opening Prayer

Eternal God, from whose love neither death nor life can separate us;
Grant that we may serve you faithfully here on earth,
And in heaven rejoice with all your saints
Who ceaselessly proclaim your glory;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever. Amen. Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Lexington, KY Nov. 4, 2001

Holy Being, we gather in your presence to celebrate your goodness, the goodness we have seen in the dawning of a new day, the goodness we trust in One who faced death with the dawn of a resurrected life, the goodness we remember in those who live in the eternal dawn of your presence. So we open our lives to a new day of life with you and lift all our prayers to celebrate your eternal goodness this day and evermore. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

Holy Being, who called all us into life, from the first Adam and Eve to the babies born around the world this morning, you have labored and we have been born; holy is your name in all the earth. We thank you this day for all who have shown us your way.

Abraham and Sarah heard your call and ventured new places, even when they were old. We listen for your call today. (Pause)

Miriam and Moses danced and led your people from suffering toward a new promise. We await a vision of your burning fire today. (Pause)

Deborah fought, Samuel prayed and they led in different ways. We are preparing to lead this day. (Pause)

David and Bathsheba sinned and were forgiven. We confess our sin and long for your grace today. (Pause)

Amos spoke and Esther stood tall for the sake of justice. We open ourselves to your strength today. (Pause)

Mother Mary and Brother Jesus accepted your call. We attend to your word this day. (Pause)

Peter and Paul, Magdalene and Lydia, and saints through the ages picked up their cross. We pray that we might faithfully follow today. (Pause)

Holy Being, who called us to into life through the saints in our lives, be born anew to us, that we might serve all your saints; the hungry and thirsty, the sick and imprisoned, the naked and forgotten to honor to your holy name in all the earth. Amen.

Litanies for All Saints Day

A Litany of Praise for the God of All The Saints

L: Gracious God, you are to be praised for the women and men whose faithful witness to your love inspires each generation of your people.

R: Mindful of all those who have gone on ahead of us, teach us to follow their example:

L: To feed the poor; to support and comfort those who mourn;

R: to cherish and learn from the merciful; to be humbled by, and stand with, the peacemakers.

L: Let us clearly recognize what it means to be called the children of God, and may we know we are to be your saints.

R: Neither by our own choosing nor in our own strength, but simply by the call of Christ Jesus our Saviour.

L: Loving God, the generations rise and pass away before you.

R: You are the strength of those who labor; you are the rest of the blessed dead. We rejoice in the company of your saints.

L: We remember all who have lived in faith, all who have peacefully died, and especially those most dear to us who rest in you, whose names we remember before you now.
(reading of names; family members are asked to stand as names are read)
Give us in time our portion with those who have trusted in you and have striven to do your holy will.

R: We bless you for their lives and love, and rejoice for them that "all is well, and all manner of things will be well." Amen.

A Litany of the Saints

(Biblical, historical, denominational, congregational names can be changed)

Leader: Gracious God, you are to be praised for the women and men whose faithful witness to your love inspires each generation of your people:

ALL: Abraham and Sarah, who believed your promise even when they were old and barren;

Men: Isaiah of Jerusalem, who in a time marked by terror, proclaimed that the lion would lie down with the lamb;

Women: Ruth, whose loyalty to Naomi became a model for people of every time and place;

ALL: Esther, who risked her life before the king to save her people;

Men: Paul of Tarsus, who was beaten and shipwrecked while carrying the Gospel to us, the Gentiles;

Women: Mary Magdalene, who ran from the tomb crying out that Jesus was alive;

ALL: Martin Luther, who spoke afresh of salvation by grace alone through faith;

Men: Thomas Campbell, Barton Stone, and Alexander Campbell, who yearned for a church with the vitality of the New Testament church;

Women: Caroline Neville Pearre and Matilda Hart Younkin who created missions throughout the world and benevolence throughout the nation.

Leader: All the saints of this congregation whom we name before you today: (reading of names, family members are asked to stand as names are read). Let us pray.

ALL: God of all people, we recall the names of these witnesses, we pray they will inspire us with their extravagance: excessive love, flagrant mercy, radical affection, exorbitant charity, immoderate faith, and intemperate hope as in the way of Jesus Christ. Amen.

A Litany Of The Saints With Song Tune: Sine Nomine; Give Thanks for Life (649 Chalice Hymnal)

Leader: Gracious God, you are to be praised for the women and men whose faithful witness to your love inspires each generation of your people

Sing: Give thanks for life, the measure of our days,
Mortal, we pass through beauty that decays
Yet sing to God our hope, our love, our praise,
Alleluia! Alleluia!!

ALL: Abraham and Sarah, who believed your promise even when they were old and barren;

Men: Isaiah of Jerusalem, who in a time marked by terror, proclaimed that the lion would lie down with the lamb;

Women: Ruth, whose loyalty to Naomi became a model for people of every time and place;

ALL: Esther, who risked her life before the king to save her people;

Men: Zacchaeus, who climbed a tree in order to see Jesus and received a new life;

Women: Mary Magdalene, who ran from the tomb crying out that Jesus was alive;

Sing: Give thanks for those who made their life a light
Caught from the Christ-flame, bursting through the night,
Who touched the truth, who burned for what is right,
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Leader: We remember all the saints of this congregation, whom we name before you today: (reading of names) Let us sing:

Sing: And for our own, our living and our dead,
Thanks for the love by which our life is fed,
A love not changed by time or death or dread,
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Leader: God of all people, we recall the names of these witnesses, we pray they will inspire us with their extravagance: excessive love, flagrant mercy, radical affection, exorbitant charity, immoderate faith, and intemperate hope as in the way of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sing: Give thanks for hope, that like the wheat, the grain
Lying in darkness, does its life retain
In resurrection to grow green again.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Invitations to Communion

This is a special day of remembering. We have remembered those Saints who died in the Lord in the last year. We remember at his table every week in worship the one who made us all Saints, the Special One Jesus Christ. He invited his followers to do this in remembrance of him. All are invited to bring memories to this table and present them to the present one.

Many of the Saints whom we honored today were people with whom we shared meals, Family meals at the dinette table, holiday feasts in the dining room, picnic table barbecues, or church family meals at a carry-in dinner. Jesus ate meals with saints and sinners. So powerful was his presence in life that even in death those who had shared meals with him sensed he was still present when they broke bread and shared cup. The love feast of the early church is repeated here today when we share the meal at this communion table and sense his continued love in our lives.

Benedictions

God's people have celebrated all that God has done,
from creation,
to the cross,
to the saints who have lived among us.
Now we go from this place
to the work place,
the home place,
the market place;
every place living as God's own people.

For all the saints, who from their labors rest, let us go and labor for the rest of our lives!

O when the saints, O when the saints; O when the saints go marching out,
Let us go to be part of that number;
let us be saints when we march out.

Sermon Resources

I Believe The Sinner Can Be A Saint

(Matthew 23:1-12)

Richard J. Hull II

I believe the sinner can be a saint. Let's talk about what I mean by saint.

- In the New Testament the word saint refers not so much to the superior Christian as much as it refers to those who are the church. Paul addresses the "saints" in various cities. He is speaking to the local church not the accomplished practitioner.

- To be saintly is to be different, it is to be set apart but set apart and different from those who are separated from God. Those who do not believe.

- To be a saint in the New Testament is to be in the church.

So, I believe the one who has been separated from God, that is, a sinner, can be brought to God.

- I don't believe that the sinner will become perfect, although that is direction we head,

- Nor do I believe that every sinner can be canonized as the Catholic Church canonizes special Christians who live exemplary, miracle doing lives.

- I believe a sinner can be brought to God and into a community of people who seek to live out life with God and in the inclusion sinners become saints.

I believe a sinner can be a saint because it is what Jesus believed. Read Matthew 23:1-12. In this passage Jesus seems to understand that many of his listeners found that the Pharisees made religion more difficult for them. These religious leaders were so devout, they prayed so hard, they wore special clothes, carried out special routines, and even their simplest worship aids were fancy.

I think of the Pharisees when I see the fancy Bible covers some of us use to protect our Bibles. I think sometimes we are more concerned about showing off our piety than we are about protecting our Bibles. In this passage it seems that Jesus is trying to overcome the tendency that exists in us as people to think we aren't good enough. Jesus seems to be saying, "Now just because you don't have the kind of prayer shawls the Pharisees have. Or the fancy arm band, (phylacteries they were called), doesn't mean you can't belong to God." To the humble people hearing Jesus that day, it must have been most encouraging to hear: all who humble themselves will be exalted.

I think Jesus was saying: "I believe you who see yourselves as sinners can be Saints."

This message of Jesus was a word of hope to people who believed they were doomed to life without God because they had no possibility of being like the Pharisees. Have you ever been without hope?

- Ever thought that you were beyond saving, beyond redemption?

- Have you ever thought that in this world you had no worth?

We live in a world that wants us to believe that.

- And it undermines our hope by dangling unending material desires before us. A newer bigger car, a larger house, finer clothes, a more exotic vacation.

- We all know people who have more than we do, and the world uses that to undermine our sense of self worth, and we begin to think we have no hope.

- Jesus was telling the people life is not about what the Pharisees have. It's about the truth they teach. Jesus believed his audience, those "sinners," could be saints. Jesus was speaking a word of hope

This was also a word of grace. You know about grace don't you?

- Grace is God's undeserved kindness offered to those who deserve nothing.

- The Pharisees seemed to forget that God's grace was offered to them not because they were such good worshipers but because they worshipped One who is so good.
 - Sometimes we forget that our relationship with God is not dependent on how good we are, or on how hard we work at it, or whether we have done right or wrong.
 - Sometimes we forget that our relationship with God is dependent entirely upon God's grace, love.
 - We all know people who are far better at living the Christian life than we are, and we are tempted to look at them the way these people looked at the Pharisees and think by comparison, "We're doomed".
 - Jesus is telling the people it's not about how good others are but about how good God is.
- I believe sinners can be Saints because Jesus believed that sinners could be saints.

I also believe that sinners can be Saints because I know Gus' Story

- Gus was born into what we sometimes called a mixed marriage.
- His mother was a devout Christian. His father didn't go to church.
- Gus' mother raised him in church but he was not baptized. She believed that baptism washed away sins committed before the act of baptism and so she wanted to wait until the passions of youth and its many mistakes had passed.

Sometime you get what you expect, and Gus didn't prove his mother wrong.

- A bright boy; he was young when he went off to study and as is common at the phase in life he did things that weren't the best.
- He took up with a woman considered my many to be beneath his station in life.
- He had a child but wouldn't marry the mother, yet they lived as family for many years.

His sharp mind led him to study and then serve as a professor.

- He explored many philosophical ideas.
- Ancient philosophers attracted him but not the philosophies of Jesus that his mother loved.
- As a youth he had stolen from his family from his neighbors, had loved the titillation of the theater and of course was attracted to the ladies.
- He knew that all this was wrong so he liked a theory that blamed it on matter
- He claimed that the physical trap of the human soul kept him from taking personal responsibility.
- This theory worked for awhile. But after extended thought and practice the calling of all physical reality evil didn't work.

He went on in his thinking.

- He tried to apply ancient Greek philosophy like that of Plato
- Then for a while grew disenchanted with finding any explanation for how life worked
- Although Gus later said he never quit believing in God.

Re-enter mom.

- She moved from their hometown to the university town where Gus now was teaching
- Bother A. M. Rose was the most highly regarded and influential Christian preacher in that town.
- Gus, who taught speech communication as well as philosophy, went to hear Bro. Rose.
- What most impressed Gus was that Brother Rose was a thinker, a man of intellectual rigor, as well as a follower of Christ.

Gus' life entered a period of complete turmoil.

- He abandoned the woman with whom he had lived and borne a child.
- He took up with another woman, and was being pressured to marry a third by his family

- He learned about illiterate monks who lived a celibate life, a feat he could now hardly imagine despite his great education.
- And at just that time he discovered that his mentor in philosophy had joined the church through a public confession of faith.

Now his heart and mind were in utter turmoil.

- He was unable to make sense of body, mind or spirit.
- At a party he abandoned the house for the peace of a backyard garden where
- He heard children playing nearby.
- He heard a refrain that sounds like, "Take up and read, take up and read, take up and read."

A Bible was close at hand and

- Gus opened to the New Testament where he had of late been reading
- His eyes fell on these words, "Not in reveling, and not in drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and in jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision of the flesh, and at that moment, in that year, the year 386 the man we know as St. Augustine was converted to Christ.
- Soon, he was baptized by Bro. Rose, whom we know as Ambrose the bishop of Milan.
- Yes, your see, a sinner became a saint.

I believe sinners can be saints not only because Jesus said it, and not only because it happened to St. "Gus". I believe it because I see it happening to you and to me.

- We are sinners. We are becoming saints.
- Sin is that which separates us from God.

Our loved ones whom we honored today on this All Saints Day were also sinners, I knew enough of them well enough, to say today what I might have said the day of their funeral, "They were sinners."

We are like Christians portrayed in stained glass windows.

- People from the Bible and from history
- They were sinners and became saints through faith
- We may never be portrayed in a church window but we are those windows

We are becoming saints by grace alone.

- The only cure for our sin Augustine said was the miracle of God's grace demonstrated to us through Christ and making possible: forgiveness, reconciliation and healing.
- It is a miracle act which is never completed.
- Sin remains until the grave. Perfection is impossible.
- We can never be perfect only perfected by God's grace in all eternity.

We are sinners but we are becoming saints.

- In the Catholic Church a saint can't be canonized unless a miracle is proven. I believe every time a sinner becomes a saint there is a miracle.
- Every time someone who feels worthless discovers their worth a miracle happens, a saint is made.
- Every time someone who feels unlovable discovers God loves them a miracle happens, a saint is made.
- Grace defies all logic. It is unnatural. It is the divine at work in our lives.

I believe you and I are sinners and we can be saints by the grace of God.

For All the Saints
(John 11:32 – 44; Revelation 21:1-6; Isaiah 25:6-9)
Rev. Lee Hull Moses

We changed our clocks this weekend, falling back to end daylight savings time. Daylight savings is funny, isn't it? It's sort of like our ultimate attempt to control time – which is ultimately uncontrollable – and it's actually sort of impressive that we manage to pull it off, that we all manage to get to church at the right time the next day. I don't think I've ever actually stayed up until 2 in the morning to watch the time jump ahead to 3 or fall back to 1. That must be the closest we get to some kind of time warp. I guess it's a little like staying up until midnight on New Year's Eve, when one year turns into the next; when December turns into January, when today turns into tomorrow.

The funny thing about tomorrow, though, is that as soon as you get there, it's today again, right? I ran across a silly song – maybe you know it, I think it was featured on a Muppet Show many years ago – about a small town in southwest Ohio called Morrow (M-O-R-R-O-W), which as you can imagine, leads to all kinds of confusion and lends itself well to all kinds of jokes. The song is about someone who is trying to catch a train to Morrow but missed the train going today and so would have to wait and go tomorrow. The song goes on and on, but at one point, the clerk at the train station sings: “For the train today to Morrow if the schedule is right, Today it gets to Morrow and returns tomorrow night. ^[1]” Quoted in Homiletics, November – December 2009; pg. 10-11
Tomorrow seems to be one of those elusive places we're always looking ahead to but can't ever seem to get there.

Annie - remember the musical Annie? – Annie sits at her window in the orphanage and looks toward tomorrow – only a day away – whenever she's feeling hopeless, because she knows that there's always hope, tomorrow.

Isaiah – remember the prophet Isaiah? – Isaiah looks at his people driven out of their homes and sent into exile, their temple and their cities destroyed, and looks toward tomorrow – the God-promised tomorrow – and sees a mountain on which “the Lord of hosts will make for all the people a feast of rich food and well-aged wines.”

And John – remember John of Patmos? – John sat on the island of Patmos where he was sent in exile, where he wrote the book of Revelation. He looked out to the destruction in the world around him and looked toward tomorrow – the God-promised tomorrow – and sees a new heaven and a new earth, and hears a voice saying, “God will wipe every tear from their eyes; death will be no more, mourning and crying will be no more, for the first things have passed away... I am making all things new...”
Tomorrow...

It's getting from today to tomorrow that seems to be the hard part.

Sometimes, doesn't it feel like we can't get to tomorrow? We're like that guy trying to Morrow but he can't because the train has already left. We're like Annie, sitting in her orphanage window night after night, dreaming about tomorrow. We're like Isaiah, believing in God's promise of a new future. We're like John, seeing a vision in which death is no more... But we're here, in today, in the real struggles of the world, and sometimes tomorrow seems awfully far away.

And then, there's this story about Lazarus. Lazarus is dying, and his sisters call Jesus but he doesn't come right away, so that when he does arrive, Lazarus has already been dead for the better part of

a week. Mary is weeping when Jesus comes to her, and Jesus weeps, too, and everyone wonders the obvious question: Couldn't Jesus have kept him from dying?

But Jesus does better than that: he goes to the tomb where Lazarus was buried, and tells them to move the stone from the door, and then he calls into the tomb, “Lazarus, come out!” And Lazarus does, bound with strips of cloth from head to toe.

It's a strange and sometimes troubling story, one that simultaneously gives us hope and raises more questions than it answers: Did this really happen? Could it happen? Why doesn't happen again?

Is eternal life something that happens in some far off “tomorrow,” or something that happens now? Where are we? Today, or tomorrow? Are we looking forward to what God has promised us, or celebrating what God has already done?

Well, both, of course. That's the great tension of our tradition, everything we celebrate is based on just that: God has done great things for us, and we rejoiced. And: God will do great things for us.

It's like standing at a turning point in history, with the past behind us and the future ahead of us. Think about the folks we've met the last few weeks: Blind Bartimaeus who came running up to Jesus, knowing that his life would be changed; the rich young man who wasn't ready for his life to be changed; Job, with the tragedy of his past which would always be his present, but still looking forward to the future.

We're in the midst of our stewardship campaign right now. Every year, as a congregation and individually, we look to the past and celebrate what God has done, and we look forward to the future, making plans and building dreams.

It's fitting, I think, that we're concluding our stewardship campaign this year on All Saints Day. After all, we are here doing ministry today because of the generosity of those who came before us. They endowed us with a building and a spirit. Today we honor those people we've lost in the last year, and isn't it for them that we look forward? Isn't it for all the saints who've gone before us that we make plans for the future?

Let's take a look back at the past year, a year in which some of the saints of this congregation died. While we were grieved by their death, this has still been a good year, wouldn't you say? Though we are still missing those we've lost, we can also say, The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced!

Let's remember;

With God's help, we've served people all over the community in all kinds of ways. We've donated food and back packs and bicycles to people who need them. We've started a garden that is still producing incredible bounty. This is the way the saints have set before us.

With God's help, we've continued a strong and vibrant youth ministry and ministry for children, even without a youth director on staff. This is the way the saints have set before us.

With God's help, we've done behind-the-scenes work on everything from fixing drainpipes and air conditioners to revising administrative policies – all that not-very-exciting stuff that is so important for the rebuilding that we are doing. This is the way of the saints.

With God's help, we've gathered for worship in creative and meaningful ways. We've cared for each

other when times have been rough, we've helped each other grieve, we've celebrated together. We've welcomed new friends. This is the way of the saints.

We can say with the saints: "The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced!"

However...However.... Tomorrow is a hard place to get to, and we aren't there yet.

There are dreams God has for us that we haven't gotten to yet. And maybe we thought we'd be there by now. Maybe we're starting to feel a little discouraged. Maybe we are anxious about going forward without the presence of some of the saints. Can we just be honest about this?

Maybe we look around and we're about the same size we were a year ago, and we look around at each other and think about all the dreams we have for the congregation – all that we really truly feel God is calling us to do – and we kind of wonder where all those new people are who were going to come and do it all. Better yet – if we're really being honest – where are all those new people who were going to come and pay for it all?

That's the kicker, isn't it?

A year ago, we might be thinking, we were looking ahead to tomorrow and all that God had promised us, and now it is tomorrow, or really today, and we're looking ahead to the next tomorrow and wondering how all that is going to happen.

So, yes. We've got some work to do. We've got to do be intentional about inviting people in; if we think we have something important to share here, nobody is going to know that unless we tell them. We've got to be on the lookout for ways to serve our community, and we've got to be ready to respond, and give in new ways. We've got to think about how we use the gifts of our leaders so that we all don't get so burned out running the organization of the church that we don't have time to be the church. We've got to commit to each other that we are going to live into the future of this church, and we've got to do it in part for all the saints who did it for us.

The hope God promises us is not just the future hope of banquet feasts of rich food on holy mountains with well-aged wines. It is that, but it is also a promise that there is a little bit of tomorrow – our God-promised tomorrow – in our every day. It's a promise that every day, in every moment, God is rolling away that stone that keeps us inside wrapped up in whatever cloths are binding us, and every moment, that tomb is opened and God is peering in and saying in a loud voice – if only we could hear – "Come out!"

Because something happens there. We do not know what and we need not fully understand, but something happens there at the edge of that tomb when the stone is pushed away (and we are right to think of another tomb, another stone rolled away...) Today we are have stood near the edge of the tomb of the saints whom we loved and honored. We can hear some of their voices calling to us today. The saints call us not only to some heavenly reality but to a faithful tomorrow. Something happens there that moves us from yesterday to tomorrow, and we stand here today, changed by what happens there, because we know, now, that the promise is true. That there is hope, not just for tomorrow, but for today.

The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoice!

God's Living Will
(Ephesians 1, Luke 6)
Richard J. Hull II

Introduction

In the spring of 1969 during my junior year in college I served as a student interim pastor of a rural church. One Sunday I made some comment about accepting that death is part of life. A nursing student in that congregation called me the next week and asked me to participate on a panel of experts to talk about what we now call "the right to die".

There I was, twenty years old, on stage with a compassionate nun, an experienced priest and a medical doctor talking about medical matters and matters of life and death as if I had some idea of what I was talking about. I didn't.

I would no more today speak on such a panel in public than I would discuss rocket science. It isn't that I know less than I did then. I now know how much I don't know.

The issue back then was sustaining life on a respirator; to turn it off or not to turn it off; that was the question. Over the years that issue has been fairly well resolved. Respirators are used well to bridge a person from illness to health but most of us have come to accept that sometimes life should be allowed to take its course even if that course is death.

This whole issue has created a new legal document that is commonly called a "Living Will". They read something like this:

"I Willfully and voluntarily make known my desire that my dying not be artificially pronged under the circumstances set forth and if my attending or treating physician and another consulting physician have determined that there is no reasonable medical probability of my recovery from such condition I direct life prolonging procedures be withheld or withdrawn when the application of such procedures would serve only to prolong artificially the process of dying.....

Many of us who are gathered here today, remembering loved ones, faced these issues in the past year or two. Coming here today brings us joy as we rejoice in memories of that loved one, and hope as we celebrate Christ's victory over death. But let's be honest, a tear of sadness returns also. We are to be commended for the days and months even years of grieving that we have endured. We have cast our burden upon the Lord and he has sustained us. Tears and sadness are part of God's care. They are expressions of love.

Perhaps the death that you faced was a difficult one. If you were aided in any of your decisions by a pastor, a friend a doctor a , tell someone about it. And if your loved one had a living will, legally signed or discussed intimately with you, tell people about that also.

A will, any will is a device to describe how we want things to go in the future.

In addition to "living wills" that strive to direct our "end of life" future we also have a "property" wills which tell how we want our resources distributed among our heirs in the future. If you don't have a "property" will, get one! In this age of anti-government sentiment, the fact is that if you don't have a will and you leave assets the government will decide how they are distributed. And I urge you to

consider the church in your will. We have celebrated the endowment funds of this congregation today, funds created by saints of this congregation. Thanks to the saints our church's mission has prospered through those funds.

But, in addition to living and property wills then there is what I would call our "personal" will. A personal will is an attempt to control things in the future over which we have no real control. You often hear sports casters talk about an athlete's "will to win." Bobby Knight the infamous Indiana Basketball coach used to say, "everyone has a will to win, what most people lack is a will to practice".

In the book of Ephesians we hear Paul describe a way of understanding what could be called "God's Living Will". God has a will; an intent, a desire. And that will is made known according to chapter 1, "In Christ". Some dozen times in one chapter, the author uses the phrase, "In Christ".

Before we look at that passage let me quickly summarize:

Leslie Weatherhead made three distinctions about the will of God

- God's Intentional Will -- God's desire and dream for all creation
- God's Circumstantial Will -- God's adaptations when circumstances change
- God's Ultimate Will -- toward which God moves in all circumstances

Read Ephesians 1 and Comment begin with v. 5

5. God destined us for adoption as God's children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of God's will, (because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ I call it God's living will). was that we be God's children.

The people in Ephesus and also, you and me.

When my children were born my wife and I created a will that said if something happened to us Linda's sister would be their guardian. If that had happened a judge would have made sure our will was carried out. So God's will that we be God's children was carried out by Jesus; Jesus is in a sense the trustee of God's will.

6. To the praise of God's glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the beloved.

God's will that we be God's children was by grace.

We don't earn our inheritance, it is given by God's kindness, grace

This is the way it is all wills. What we inherit is by the grace of the benefactor.

The means of grace, the way God's will was carried out was through Christ.

By Christ's life, death and resurrection.

Next Ephesians provides several references now to what has happened in Christ.

7. In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.

Redemption and forgiveness, similar but not the same.

Redemption: Set free, a slave granted freedom, was redeemed, slave could be bought and declared to no longer be a slave. We could say that we have been slaves to sin and have been bought by blood.

Forgiveness: One can be a free person yet bound by past. A prisoner set free still has a record that can be used against him. Forgiveness overcomes the past.

Let me explain it in terms of inheriting stocks that have a growth in value.

- Bought Company: ABC for \$100, and it is now worth \$1,000
- If you were to sell that stock, it would be a redemption it so it had usable worth.

- However under current tax laws you would owe on the \$900 of profit or capital gain.
- However if you die and your child inherits the stock they inherited at what is called the stepped up value or at \$1,000.
- No one owes tax on the \$900. Your death forgives the tax that is due if the stock is redeemed.
- By the way this is a good way to make gifts to the church

Christianity talks about the will of God this way. Jesus is the expression of the will

- Jesus both redeemed us: made us useful
- And forgave us, responsibility for our "past taxes" is overcome.

8. Jesus has made known to us the mystery of God's will, ...set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time: to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

- God has shown us God's will, intention, in Christ
- In Christ we have a plan for all time, and it is to gather up all things to God
- Author understands that we might think Christ is all about me. I'm saved, I'm redeemed, I'm forgiven
- We need to remember we are but one of the heirs of the living will of God.
- God's plan is to include all things. We are to be In Christ...
- Don't forget Luke 6: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you
Give to everyone who begs from you
Do to others as you would have them do to you.

- We see that it's not about me it is about God.

9. In Christ we have obtained an inheritance

- The passage continues the metaphor of adoption as children.
- One thing we get when we become a child is an inheritance.
- I'm an only child. I got it all. My parents were gracious.
- But my inheritance was distributed long before my parent's death.
- Because of Christ's death, by which we become God's children we are already receiving the inheritance. A difference is being made now.

I always understood that my inheritance from my parents was already paying dividends before they died.

- When my kids were small and I was earning a modest starting pastor's salary, I had a sense that my inheritance was already in place.
- If something would have happened to me, my parents would have seen to it that my kids were taken care of, they would have had a home, and food and money for college.
- The inheritance had value long before I received it.

We have been adopted as Children of Christ and we are already receiving the benefit of our inheritance.

- In verse 14 it is called the pledge of our inheritance.
- Knowing that we inherit the promise of life eternal makes a difference in our life here and now.
- I spend no time worrying about what happens to me when I die.
- God's living will experienced in the resurrection of Jesus has provided me an eternal hope.
- And that hope keeps me from anxiety today and frees me to live in the way of Christ. I am already receiving my inheritance

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11. In Christ we have received the word of truth and been marked by the Holy Spirit.

When somebody dies their will has to be handed properly.

- A process is followed to confirm that the document is in good order,
- Uncontested, that it is true then it is properly sealed or recorded,
- Filed in the office of the clerk.

Ephesians declares the Will of God is authenticated by the word of truth. Sealed or marked by the Holy Spirit.

- God's will is God's destiny for us. God has made a living will. Like every will it needed a witness.
- That witness is the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit affirms God has signed a living will for us.
- The Holy Spirit sees that the will has been signed properly and that God's mark is on God's will and it is clear

And God's mark is the mark of a cross. The Cross becomes the signature on God's Living Will.



About the Author



The Rev. Richard Hull is a retired Disciple pastor. A native of Akron, Ohio, he grew up in Barberton Christian Church. He graduated from Bethany College and Yale Divinity School. He served the Christian Church of Wilkesburg, Pittsburgh, PA; West Street Christian Church, Tipton, IN, and Riverside Avenue Christian Church, Jacksonville, FL. He has been an advocate for Legacy Fund policies in those congregations; gifts from the Saints continue to help undergird and enhance those congregations' witnesses.

His wife, Linda, is the chief development officer for Girl Scouts in Northeast Florida and a member of the Christian Church Foundation Board of Directors. He has two daughters, Lee Hull Moses, pastor of First Christian Church, Greensboro, NC, and Lynn Hull, an elementary school teacher in Boston, MA.

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