

A Sermon for All Saints Sunday

[Revelation 21:1-6, John 11:32-44](#)

Today is All Saints Sunday. It is a day when we remember all those who have gone on before us to their heavenly reward. For many of us, this is an extremely difficult time. It is hard for us to lose our loved ones. None of us would want our friends or family members to suffer, if that was the case, yet we also still want them with us in this life. Our hearts ache a little when we think of living without them.

Sometimes it may be hard to see or feel the celebration for those who are no longer a part of this life. Today is a day to remind us of the blessings that await us. God has promised a new heaven and a new earth and a time when all our tears will be wiped away. Our scripture lesson from Revelation 21 verse 4 says, “God 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.” It sounds perfect, doesn’t it? No more pain, no more sorrow, no more crying – and God will dwell with God’s people. We will be able to commune directly with God and know that we are at peace.

I guess every one of us has a special image of heaven. Maybe it’s the mansions, or the streets of gold, or the rest from our labor. We have the promise and hope of a better life beyond this world. Sometimes we may get lost in this world. We may feel that God no longer cares for us as it seems our world is in a pretty bad state. Maybe we question God about God’s decisions. Particularly today, we may question why God chose to take some of our loved ones. Why couldn’t God just resurrect our loved ones as he did Lazarus? I don’t have any answers. For myself I do need to maintain the hope that God is in control, not me. And although at times I do not understand what

happens to those around me, I know that God keeps us in God's care.

God also gave us each other. We are left with a charge to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to also love our neighbors as ourselves. We can help ease someone else's burden by sharing God's love and assurance with them. We are charged to serve God in this life, and we are given the promise of eternal life through God's son, Jesus Christ.

Rick Warren has become well known for his series, "The Purpose Driven Life." In an interview, he said this: "People ask me, 'What is the purpose of life?' And I respond: 'In a nutshell, life is preparation for eternity. We were not made to last forever, and God wants us to be with Him in Heaven. One day my heart is going to stop, and that will be the end of my body-- but not the end of me. I may live 60 to 100 years on earth, but I am

going to spend trillions of years in eternity. This is the warm-up act - the dress rehearsal. God wants us to practice on earth what we will do forever in eternity.” Our ideas of eternity and heaven will not be the same and that’s ok. One thing that will be the same for us is the assurance that God will always hold us in the palm of God’s hand.

Last year on All Saints Sunday I shared a story with you. I couldn’t find one that seemed to sum up all the meaning for this day any better, so I would like to share it again. I heard this originally from Pastor Maryann Seabrease:

A woman called her pastor to her hospital bedside. She was dying and knew she did not have much time left. She had already talked with her family about funeral arrangements, what dress she wanted to wear for burial, etc. However, she wanted a small surprise for her family. She requested to be placed in her

coffin and buried with a fork in her right hand. The woman did indeed pass away that night. All throughout the viewings and family gatherings, there was a great deal of discussion about the fork in mother's hand. Why of all things would she have requested that? All was made clear at the funeral service.

The pastor began with traditional readings and the woman's favorite songs. He talked about her love of God and family and all the good works she had done while on earth. He then addressed the woman's strange request. "Mary made a special request to be buried holding a fork in her right hand. I'm sure you are all wondering why. She told me that over her lifetime she had attended many church suppers. Every time, she thoroughly enjoyed the meal, even during the lean years when the fare wasn't so elaborate. After the main course and without fail, someone would always turn to her and say, 'keep your

fork.’ That was her clue that no matter how delicious and wonderful the meal was, something better was still to come with dessert. So Mary requested to be buried with a fork in her hand as a message to all of you. No matter how wonderful her life was while she was on earth, sharing joys and tears with her family and friends, she knew there was something better waiting for her in heaven. In her words she wanted you all to know she kept her fork.

Today we honor those who have gone on before us and await us in heaven. We may think of songs like, “In the Sweet By and By,” or “I’ll Fly Away,” or “When the Saints Go Marching In,” as we remember how much our loved ones touched our lives in this world. I want to leave you with this message of hope: When it is time for each of us to pass on from this life, ‘Keep your fork.’ Join me in a word of prayer....

Creator God,

As a congregation we pause today to remember those that have passed on from this life into life eternal with you. Our hearts are saddened and our sorrow is great. At times we may feel the burden is too heavy for us to bear. But you offer us your comfort and strength to carry us through the difficult times.

God, we know that when we falter and turn away from you, your guiding hand is always there to lift us up to new heights so that we can continue to serve you in this life. I thank you for this congregation and for the extended family they have become, ready to support one another through the trials of life. Bless and strengthen us together as a body of Christ so that we may continue to serve you in this community. We ask that you remain as our steadfast beacon to guide us every step of the way. We ask for comfort, we ask for peace, we ask for strength, we ask for courage, and we ask for compassion so that we may pass

these gifts on to others who are hurting in our community.

Grant this through Christ our Lord, Amen.