

## **All Saints A 2020**

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

November 1, 2020

Revelation 7:9-17

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends:

There is a cluster of holidays and observances at this time of year, and those of us fortunate enough to live in Tucson, Arizona, are exposed to most of them. Halloween, the Day of the Dead, All Souls. Lutherans celebrate Reformation Day. But all of these are offshoots of one Christian holy day, historical and cultural side dishes to one Christian holy day: All Saints. Today.

All Saints is about heaven. It's about Easter. It's about the dead, and what happens to the dead after they die. It's about the living, and how our lives in this world are integrated with the lives of those who have departed from this world. Some of them inspire us. Some of them—the memory of them—inspire us to be the best we can. Their lives and their words have become a sort of sacred text for us. Though they are flawed, we see in them how God uses clay to mold human beings who foster and nurture his life and his goodness.

This day, more than any other, is about the communion of saints. Hollywood gave us a movie in 1984, "Places in the Heart." Sally Field won an Oscar for her role. At the end of the movie the characters are in church. This is in Waxahachie, Texas. And they are passing the communion to each other, seated in the pews, as is the manner in some Protestant churches. And as they pass the communion, hand to hand, the characters who died earlier in the film are there in the midst of the living, receiving, sharing, passing communion. It's kind of like one of those Escher paintings where the passing of the bread and wine becomes a never-ending circle. It's beautifully done, while the choir sings, "Ane he walks with me and he talks with me." And the final words of the film are, "peace of God." It's a beautiful scene of the living and the dead, those present and those absent, friends and enemies, black and white, being together in God's presence. Whatever the church doctrine is about the communion of saints, Hollywood may have done it better.

All Saints Day arrives at a significant moment in our congregation. On this day we are offering the first public worship service since early Lent. 34 weeks have passed since our last public worship. We pray that we might be able to continue public worship on a journey that culminates someday when all can gather without restrictions. But if we are honest with ourselves, our ability to gather depends on the weather and on the rate of community spread. So we might have public worship for a month or two, and then be forced to give it up again.

Even more important, the mere fact that *some* of us are able to gather does not mean that *all* of us are able to gather. I have to say that again. The mere fact that *some* of us are able to gather does not mean that *all* of us are able to gather. And that's why All Saints is such a significant thing. It is *THE* day when we remember that the Church is not just the local gathering. The little community that we can see with our eyes.

There can be a bit of idolatry in local congregations. To think that *we* are the people of God. The pastor, the organist, the altar guild, the lady who brews the coffee, the man who hands out the bulletin. The friendly people that we see every week, in normal times. The local church can be such a kind place, such a warm place, that we might think that the blessing ends there. But that's a kind of idolatry. It's a vision that falls short of the vision of God. And when hard times come to the little community— as they always seem to come— the community that has a bit of God's bigger vision will be more resilient than the community whose vision is limited to what is known and what is seen. All Saints requires us to remember, to believe, to imagine how the little community we see with our eyes is connected to a much larger community.

I put a special photo on the cover of the service folder. (9:30 Perhaps those of you worshipping online will click on the email, or on the provided link on our website, to access the service folder. It's a photo from the Catholic cathedral of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Our Lady of the Angels. You'll see the gigantic tapestries of the oversized saints. They are facing the altar. And then beneath them are worshipers, standing in line on their way to communion. The very ordinary Christians of everyday Los Angeles in the company of the saints of the Bible and of the centuries of Christian history. Both Hollywood and Los Angeles are in today's sermon. Perhaps because they have the capacity to imagine beyond what we see with our everyday eyes.

So we imagine and we remember the saints who know longer walk among us because they are walking the streets of heaven. And we imagine and we remember the living members of our congregation who are at home. The mere fact that *some* of us are able to gather does not mean that *all* of us are able to gather. Many of them taking part through the internet. A few of them without internet. Praise God for the internet, but we are not held together by the internet. Praise God for this building, but we are not held together by the building. Praise God for the uniting power of music. But we are not held together even by music. We are held together by God himself. Using the internet. Using the building. Using the music. Held together in the communion of saints. Along with the people who have yet to set foot in our church. Along with the people who will never set foot here again. God grant us the capacity to imagine. God grant us the capacity to remember. Amen.