



Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA

Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick

All Saints Sunday- November 3, 2019

“Signs of Inheritance, Signs of Hope”

Sermon Text: Ephesians 1:11-23

Today is a day for remembering that the church of Jesus Christ is so much larger than what we see. My Irish ancestors would say that a day like today, All Saints Day, is a “thin place.” A place where somehow the divide between this world and the world to come seems closer, as we remember and celebrate the saints at rest, while also remembering that we are ALL saints. The saints at rest are now in God’s care, while we who are living are seen by God as saints even though we are very much sinners who make mistakes, and lose our way. Yet God is always calling us home. God chooses to see us as saints, and promises us life forever.

Today at Grace, we are seeing a full circle of this life. At 10:30 we celebrate a new child claimed by God in baptism- given faith and the Holy Spirit to begin life’s journey. At 9:00 we will celebrate 18 children receiving Holy Communion, a new step in their journey. And we name those 20 saints of Grace along with those in our hearts, who are dear to us and to God. Their earthly journey has ended and their life is now one of God’s promises fulfilled. A full circle of God’s gifts and promises. Stories of faithful people and a faithful God.

In our worship space are symbols we see here of the promises we do not fully see. Three things we inherit as Ephesians tells us. God gives us a circle, a meal and a cross.

The rail around our altar is a circle that shows us God gives us a place- to be in communion. Communion means to be “together with.” We are together with God and with each other. When we gather around this circle or just see it, we see a reminder that we are also in communion with everyone who has ever kneeled or stood here, and those with God anywhere. Those who have died see God face to face, a promise that will be ours too. We are together in a circle that has no end. Our life with God has end. God gives us this circle.

God gives us a meal, the meal of communion, where we remember God’s promise Jesus spoke in the meal he shared with his very first followers. And across thousands of years, all the way here, Jesus shares this meal with us. Bread and wine, Christ’s body and blood given for us. This meal is a reminder and a promise. God wants us to try our best, because it is good for us and for

our world. But we will all hurt people's feelings, forget what God asks of us, or maybe even run away from it- this is sin. This meal reminds us that God forgives our sins. And promises that we will always have a place with God in this meal- we will never be kicked out. This meal reminds us that Jesus is present with us now.

These things are true because of the cross. God gives us the cross as a sign that God made us, loves us, forgives us and wants us to follow Jesus. And these things- the circle, the meal and the cross are things we can see that give us hope. We can set our hope in Jesus. God knows we are not perfect, and sometimes life will feel hard, but God wants us to stay faithful. And God wants us be together with God. The circle, the meal and the cross are signs of God's heart- God's love and promise- so we don't give up, we keep following Jesus.

These signs remind us that we have an inheritance, a fancy word that means someone promises to give us something. God's promise is that we will be with God forever. The thing about a promise that we have to wait to really see, is that waiting is hard. We get impatient, or distracted. We wonder if it really will happen. God gives us these things we can see to help us with what we cannot see. So God wants us to be here often with the circle, the meal and the cross, so we remember who God is, who we are, and what God promises. These things are lessons of faith.

Lots of people have learned these things, and taught others and encouraged them. They have prayed with them, and cheered them on. The first followers of Jesus, and all kinds of everyday people across times have said to each other- We have received faith and God's promises. And so have you. We believe God's promises and so can you. When we give thanks for the saints, we thank God for those people who have taught and prayed for and helped us.

Now it's our turn to pass on this faith-

We pass it on to people who are younger than us,

To people going through something that maybe we have gone through so we help,

To people just getting to know Jesus

And to people trying to remember and hold on.

Just like everyone who lived before us.

Today, in this church, all these people are here- ones we see, and others who have died. We can't see them like we used to, but there is one more symbol to help us.

When we light a candle we remember that Jesus is the light in the darkness. We remember people whose light brightened our world, and showed us how to follow Jesus. We light a candle and remember the best in them. But I hope we also remember them in all of the moments when they really didn't shine. Because in spite of those things, God chose to love them anyway, just as God loves us.

And God promises that even though today we only see a candle, it too is a reminder that our story with God doesn't end. There is an even bigger feast to come when we will all be gathered around Christ, in the communion of the saints, to praise God forever.

Until that promised and blessed day, God gives us these signs- a circle, a meal, the cross and the candle to encourage us. God gives us each other.

And God gives us a purpose.

It begins in our baptism, when we are claimed by God, given faith and the power of the Holy Spirit, and baptized into new life through Christ's death and resurrection. At baptism, we light that first candle in a new life and say, "Let your light so shine." So friends, shine!

Shine so people will see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Shine like those who have gone before. Pass on that light. Share that faith and remember that the circle, the meal, the cross and the light assure us the words of God's promises are true, for us and for all the saints, forever.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.