

From Every Tribe - All Saints Sunday

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Preacher: Pastor Scott Johnson

[0 : 0 0] Good morning. The readings this morning are from 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 9 through 13, and the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 23, verses 1 through 12.

1 Thessalonians. Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship. We work night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preach the Gospel of God to you.

You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed. For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

We also thank God continually because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

End of Matthew. Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples, The teachers of the land and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat, so you must be careful to do everything they tell you.

[1 : 2 2] But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

Everything they do is done for people to see. They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long. They love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues.

They love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called rabbi by others. But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.

And do not call anyone on earth father, for you have one father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Messiah.

The greatest among you will be your servant, for those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. This is the word of God. Thanks be to God.

[2 : 3 0] So let's pray together. Loving God, thank you for the gift it is to have this moment, to have this time. And as we have opened our hearts to you, Lord, please move in each heart here.

Plant a fresh seed that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and the glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. Amen. So how'd you get here today?

Pretty straightforward question, right? So how'd you get here today? Most of us have a straightforward answer. Some of us got here on time, right?

There were some who forgot about that thing that happens with our clocks last night, but most of us got here on time. But I want you to think a little more deeply about how you got here today.

Because most of our minds locked in on the pretty obvious answer of we drove. But I want you to really think about how is it that given the life you have lived and the days you have walked through, that you ended up as a disciple of Christ in this place here this morning.

[3 : 39] Because when you remember that journey, when you think about the people who helped you all along the way, that's why All Saints Day matters.

See, none of us got here on our own. And even if you were raised in a place where people were not active in their faith, maybe even hostile to the things of Christ, but once you took a step, there were people along the way who encouraged you, who cheered you on, who showed you some things, and helped you grow.

And that is how you got here. And as you consider that journey, the difference it makes, I want you to bring those faces to mind.

Because this day is important to us. And we have to honor that legacy. You see, when I think of the people who helped me get here today, of course, the most important one would have been my mother.

She went on to the Church Triumphant in 2019. And so when she made sure I was going to church when I was a kid, when she made me do those Sunday school lessons and stand up and recite things and all those plays and all that sort of stuff, you know, it was step by step, piece by piece.

[5 : 19] But she built this path of faith for me. I could see her the times when it was a struggle for her. And she would actually go to God to look for answers.

And she would get them. And could model that faith. But for those of you who have those folks who are close to you, I want you to think about some of the others.

Some of those folks you've encountered in your journey who weren't maybe members of your own house, but also helped you on your journey in faith. I'll tell you about two people who did that for me.

One was this woman named Catherine. She went by Kitty Payton. She was in the church I grew up in. Now, I started going to church when I was eight. And Miss Payton was one of the people who taught Sunday school.

She ran the junior ushers. And so she became a force in my life pretty quickly. But the time that makes the most impression, the time I really saw the difference one of these saints would make, was when my grandmother died.

[6 : 28] I was 11. It was the first time I ever dealt with death. So I'm in the funeral home, and everybody's doing that thing you do at funeral homes. And now I'm 11, sitting in the corner.

It was Miss Payton who came and sat down with me. And she was the one who just made sure I was okay. But she took the time to make this whole thing make sense to an 11-year-old in a way I could understand.

That's a saint. There's another woman. Her name was Helen Wargo. She was one of the first people I met when I came to Buffalo.

I was looking for a church at the time. And I walked into this place. She was the first person I met. And Helen was kind of a little thing.

But she had this big personality. And she had that gift of making you feel welcome. She said all the right things.

[7 : 31] She invited you to everything that was coming up because she had it all memorized. She knew everybody's name and introduced me to everybody. And within minutes, made me feel like she'd known me my whole life.

And as I walked with her over the years, she continued to show us a whole lot. Now, I'm forgetting the exact year Helen went on to her glory. But that's another one of those examples of saints that we encounter over the course of our lives.

Who are those people? For you. And as we gather today, see, we trip over this thing called All Saints Day.

Because, as I told you before, the most important saint in my life was my mother. But there were days that I wanted to call her anything but a saint. Y'all know what I'm talking about.

And the reason why I want us to sit with that for a minute, the reason why we need to wrestle with that is because when you know people like that, when you see them in the fullness of their humanity, and you know how imperfect they are, when we come to days like today, it's hard to put that word saint on top of their life.

[8 : 54] So, y'all know how I do. So, when I figured out, well, we need to figure out what makes somebody a saint. I went and looked it up. So, here's the definition of a saint.

Okay? And this is what they say first. And I want y'all to catch this. This is what they say first. They being dictionary.com. A person acknowledged as holy and virtuous, typically regarded as being in heaven after death.

The second thing they say is, in the Catholic or Orthodox traditions, a person formally recognized or canonized by the church after death, who may be the object of veneration and prayers for intercession.

Now, I want you to pay attention to that order. Okay? Because some of you who have Catholic backgrounds, and some of us who don't, right?

The challenge is, is we flip those. We think of the formal definition of saint first. That the people who are on the stained glass and in the paintings, those are the people we hold up as saints.

[10 : 06] And we don't think of the people in our own lives as saints. And that's part of our challenge. Because you heard me say during our greeting time today, that in our faith tradition, we see a saint as anyone who is a follower of Christ.

And the point of that message is that includes you. Now, that's where we need to sit for a little bit.

Because when we think of those folks who helped us on the way, when we think of the ways in which our lives are better, because there are these people who knew God and poured God into us, when we think of all the things that people have done to teach us, show us, and provide the example for us of what it means to walk as a disciple through how hard this world can be, and we've said yes, we shouldn't hesitate to embrace what it means to be a saint.

Now, when we think about our own lives, that's where the scripture lessons that we study today come in. Because when most of us look in the mirror or sit here and self-reflect, we don't think of ourselves as particularly saintly.

Now, that's not an entirely bad thing. Let me tell you why that could be a good thing. That can be a good thing if it keeps you humble. If it keeps you realizing that you are a sinner.

[11 : 38] That you are imperfect. And you know that you have things to do in order to be more holy in your life. And if you are striving for that. If you are working at that.

And if you understand in the pit of your soul that the only way that you have been able to connect with God, that the truest and most sincere only thing that happens in your life that gets rid of the sin and the muck that you have created by your own choices is the blood and sacrifice of Jesus, that's a good thing.

However, in addition to that humility, did you not catch the power of the message earlier?

The thought of that moment that's coming someday. That time when this earthly life is over and you get to be face to face with him.

And then that day in the future where all of the heavenly host streams in and is around the throne, we are part of that picture.

[12 : 57] And yet, there's still something that keeps us from like fully embracing that image. And that's what we have to sort of balance out.

To not be so hesitant to step into. But as you think about the saint you are, remember some important pointers.

Hence, our scripture lesson. Because those things that made people make a difference for you, the challenge for us today is are you doing the same?

So, in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, the first one, there's a lot going on in that letter, even though it's relatively small. The key here is that one of the challenges made against Paul is that he's in it for himself.

That he's trying to get rich, basically. Like he's in this for money or he's in it for some wrong reason. And that's why he writes the section that you heard Carol read for us today.

[14 : 02] And I want us to hear some pieces of this because it gives us some pretty good advice. So, if you want to follow along, this is 1 Thessalonians. We're in chapter 2. We're going to read from verse 9.

Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship. We worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.

I want to pause there. See, the key is that what Paul is trying to get across is that some folks who are arguing that he's in this for himself, what he's pointing out is, while I was with you and I was doing all that teaching and work, I had a day job.

So, I didn't ask anybody to pitch in. I didn't ask anybody to pay for my own meals. I didn't do any of that. I worked during the day and then we gathered at night. And so, if folks are saying that, well, I'm just in this for myself, then check the record.

But what I want you to do is take that and check the record of the saints that you were just imagining. Because those faces that came to your own head, one of the things that you can probably say full throat and remember is that they weren't in this for themselves.

[15 : 20] That they spent their time taking care of you and of others because that's what their faith compelled them to do.

That's what love looked like in their lives. And yeah, they had other things to worry about. But they spent their time.

They gave their energy to make sure that you either got what you needed, learned what you needed to learn, or at least knew you were taken care of.

They weren't in it for them. Second thing going on here, verse 10, you are witnesses and so is God of how holy, righteous, and blameless we were among you who believed.

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God who calls you to his kingdom and glory.

[16 : 34] One of the things about those folks, those people who we lift up today, is that not only were they not in it for themselves and wanted to take care of you, they pointed ultimately to Christ.

That what this was about here wasn't just about puffing their own selves up. They needed to point you to the real hero. They needed to point you to the one who does make the difference.

And when somebody is invested in you like that, when someone is willing to work like that to make sure that it is God that you understand, that it is Christ that you meet, that it is the spirit that you encounter, and not just put the glory on themselves, that shows you the heart of a saint.

Because that, friends, is hard stuff. Because when folks love you, folks will do a lot of good things. But remember, we spent time talking about the fact that most folks love somebody.

Right? So the idea that somebody loves somebody else isn't really that exceptional on this planet. But the fact that somebody loves you enough to point you to the person who loves you best in the universe, that's something different.

[18 : 11] To make sure that that love pays off in his love being made real for you. That's special. And that's what we celebrate.

How did you get here today? You see, when we think about what Jesus was teaching the crowd around him, he pointed to something that was wrong with the Pharisees.

Now, he does that a lot. But the key piece in this particular lesson, as it connects to what we're talking about, is hear what Jesus says about folks who fake it.

Because he says that the Pharisees like to sit in Moses' seat. Now, here's where it gets a little weird because it says, do what they tell you, but don't do what they do. Okay?

It says, do what they tell you, but don't do what they do. Now, here's what Jesus is actually saying. Remember, they sit in Moses' seat. What he's saying is that these are the people who are your teachers. In other words, when that group of people came to synagogue that day, it was usually one of those guys who was teaching.

[19 : 26] So they'd get up and they'd read from the Bible of the time. So, when Jesus says, do what they teach you, that's the moment he's pointing to. But when y'all get up and go outside and you see them in the street, don't act like they act.

Because, essentially, they're faking it. That they're just putting it on. It's a show. That they're maybe doing the best they can, but in reality, they're not living this word that they're teaching you.

That's ultimately his point. So don't fall for that. The reason why I bring that up and I highlight it is that each of us, and we think of those folks who made a difference in our lives, the key here is that we have the evidence that they weren't faking it because they had such an influence on our lives.

That if it wasn't real, we wouldn't feel how we feel. If it didn't make a difference, it wouldn't have paid off in where we are right now. So they weren't just putting it on.

That love was genuine. That love was authentic. And again, I bring us back to what this is really about.

[20 : 48] Because as we sit here on All Saints Day, the challenge is not how well you remember those folks, but if we're really going to honor what they did for us, the real question is who are you doing it for?

Because that's ultimately the honor. That if the faith you have developed over time, if your love for Christ has stepped into this next level and you know this to be true in your own life, well, have you just take that and stuck it in your own pocket?

Or are you helping someone who does not know come to know the same way they helped get you here today?

Because that's what the world needs. The world needs people who are putting this faith into practice, who are giving back in very real ways, who are tearing down injustice where they see it, and anyone who is along the way feeling lost and looking for direction, how are you the one who says, let me tell you what God did for me?

That's what this is about. Because remembering them is critical. Honoring them is different. I want y'all to hear that again.

[22 : 30] Remembering them is critical, but honoring them is something different. And if you want to honor them, if you really want to show that what they gave you has made a difference, then be like that in the world today.

Because you know that there's someone in your circle. There's someone that you encounter. There's someone who is trying to find their way.

Maybe they just need a coach or help or someone to cheer them on as they try and take their next step. But friends, can you imagine what it will be like when you from your exalted place realize that someone is telling one of these stories about you?

Because we celebrate the saints of today. the challenge for each and every one of us is to remember that we are those people.

With all that it implies and all that it means, we are those people. So let us indeed live the lives that come from that word.

[24 : 04] You see, at the end of that passage in the gospels, Jesus says, don't worry about titles. Right? He says, don't worry about don't call somebody rabbi, don't call somebody father.

Here's where we get that twisted. It's not that titles themselves are bad. It's not. What Jesus is worried about is putting someone in the seat that only God should have.

So when you think about following a rabbi and not having your own faith, or calling someone father father, and not developing your own faith, because you put all your faith in them.

That's what Jesus is trying to prevent. But think about this. The title that we're talking about today is not your enemy.

It is not beyond you. And it's one you already have, whether you understand it or not. Be the saint that Jesus knows that you are.

[25 : 09] Go into the world and make a difference for him. Amen and amen. Loving and gracious God, thank you for what it means to say yes.

Thank you for the power of those who blessed us in so many different ways. Thank you for the ways in which they cheered us on, that they gave us the tools, that they loved us when we felt unlovable, and yet they still pointed toward the truest and best love, the one that flows only from you.

Lord, help us to honor not only that in our hearts and lives, but to honor what these people whom we've lifted up today and those whom we've remembered on our own, what they have done for us.

Help us to be the saints you know we are. In Jesus' most holy name we pray. Amen. Amen and amen.

So as we consider the ways in which we will honor those who have got us here, let us look to ways in which we will live our faith over the next few weeks, one of which is, of course, our upcoming Charge Conference.

[26 : 30] that is November 18th at 1 p.m. Now a Charge Conference is functionally a business meeting with our district superintendent. You do not have to attend.

I want to be clear on that. You do not have to attend. Those who need to be there have already been told they need to be there. However, everybody is welcome to attend, which is why we announce it this way.

So Saturday, November 18th, from 1 to 3. other ways in which we're going to serve our community are in front of us. Of course, we are continuing our drive for turkeys.

We already had some folks bring some in today, and that was a beautiful thing to see. The main thing to remember is one of two things. The most important thing is November 12th, because that is the day we need to have them in hand.

So keep that in mind. There is a table in the back where you can still get a card and let us know how many turkeys you are going to bring. I know that some folks are holding out until the stores put more turkeys on sale and sort of drop.

[27 : 34] That's okay. Just keep in mind next Sunday is our day. Okay? Now, I heard Tops already had a sale on. I don't know how true that is, but I heard that was going on.

So just be aware of that. So, that said, another thing I want to highlight is that we are serving our brothers and sisters in the Seneca Bobcock neighborhood through Seneca Street United Methodist Church.

That dinner and that process is already underway. Luanne is captaining that. However, she is still looking for folks to bring certain things in. So things like side dishes, etc.

There's a sign-up sheet for that in the back. The second piece of that is she's looking for people to help. Okay? There are two different sheets. You'll see them on the table. So whether you are considering donating some of the gift, some of the items, or whether you are giving some of the time to help prepare, make sure you look at both sheets if you are able to serve.

Okay? Other things are listed in the bulletin. Please be aware of that. Your bulletin is a tremendous resource. All of that's online on the website as well if that is easier for you.

[28 : 40] That said, let's receive our benediction. Loving God, you have called us to honor those who have brought us here and those who continually bring us forward.

Lord God, let us be the saints of today as we pour into those who will be the saints of tomorrow as we seek to honor you with the ways in which we love.

Now in the name of God, our creator and king, in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our savior, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, our comforter and our sustainer, may God bless us now as we leave to love and serve God and all God's children.

Amen. Amen. Amen.