

St. Andrew's United Church (Williams Lake) – November 1, 2020

Sunday Worship – All Saints Day

(In-Person, Zoom and email)

Welcome

Welcome to the gathering of the family of Jesus. We gather on lands walked for thousands of years by people of the First Nations. We acknowledge the history, culture, and spirituality of the Secwépemc (Shuswap) People. We also honour the heritage and gifts of the Métis people. We remember our responsibility as persons who inhabit this land alongside our First Nations and Métis sisters and brothers. May we live the respect that our words offer.

In the name of Jesus, who is alive in each of us, peace to you.

And also with you.

We light a candle when we gather – a visible sign of God's presence. If you have a candle where you are, please join me as I light the candle.

Hymn – Jesus, remember me (sung at home – unaccompanied) VU 148

Jesus, remember me when you come in-to your kingdom.

Jesus, remember me when you come in-to your kingdom.

Call to Worship

Blessed are those who will not trade
in their faith for a bushel of fear,
for they know God's heart.

Blessed are those who stand alone at gravesides,
for they are wrapped in God's arms.

Blessed are those who humbly care for the vulnerable,
for they shall create new communities.

Blessed are those who miss dinner, and happy hour each night,
in order to care for the forgotten,
for they shall be filled with the manna of hope.

Blessed are those who are compassionate,
even with those who rub them the wrong way,
for they will be cared for by others.

Blessed are those who look out for their neighbors,
for they live next door to God.

Blessed are the menders of brokenness,
for they know what it is like to be reconciled to God.

Blessed are those who are mocked by the rich and the powerful,
for they know they are walking the streets of the kin-dom.

Blessed are you when others mock you,
point at your mask, think you are foolish for keeping your distance,

caring for others, for then you know you are a sibling of Jesus.
Blessed are all those who model faith for us
in these uncertain days, weeks, months.

©Thom Shuman. Lectionary Liturgies. Saturday, October 24, 2020.
All Saints Day Liturgy in a time of pandemic.
Accessed October 28, 2020. Used with permission.

Opening Prayer

For all the saints
who went before us
who have spoken to our hearts
and touched us with your fire...

For all the saints
who live beside us
whose weaknesses and strengths
are woven with our own...

For all the saints
who live beyond us
who challenge us
to change us
to change the world with them,
we praise you, O God.

Prayer of Confession

Too often we hide, O Christ, when others ask how we're doing.
"Fine," we reply, but we're not.
There is a brokenness we experience that we fear
to reveal, for we worry it makes us less, somehow
weaker, frailer, diminished. In the intimacy of
prayer, in the Spirit's embrace, we confess our
brokenness.

... a time of silent prayer ...

Words of Assurance

We have a loving God who surrounds us with
care and with compassion. We can answer God
truthfully when God asks, "How are you doing?"
God's Spirit breathes on us the assurance,
the hope, the faith, the strength we need.
Thanks be to God!

Special Music/Anthem – "Come Touch Our Hearts"

MV 12

by Gordon Light arr. by Andrew Donaldson

Scripture Reading

Matthew 5:1-12 The Beatitudes

5 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
3 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
5 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
6 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
7 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
8 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
9 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
10 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Sermon/Reflection –

Busy weekend this one. Halloween – All Hallows Eve – Saturday night; a full moon – a blue moon, the second full moon of October; the clocks went back an hour in the wee hours this morning; and it's All Saints' Day today. That's a lot of stuff packed into one weekend.

Did you see that spectacular moon Friday night? Big, round, and oh so bright? The spook-tacular moon last night? A classic Halloween moon all shrouded in wispy, floaty, dark clouds?

Halloween was very quiet up where I live, and that's okay with me since I'm kind of a Halloween scrouge, I have to say. I'm not sure when it happened, or why exactly, but there it is. At the heart of it, Halloween is a chance to have some fun, dress up, and pretend to be someone else for a while. Kids, usually, but I know at least one adult – and her husband, who may or may not be consenting - who go all out. They dress up their house and their yard and give out the best treats and it's amazing. A steady stream of ghosts and goblins, princesses and superheroes, doctors, nurses, zombies come from blocks around. Kids dressed up as a character they'd really like to be. That's the great thing about it all – for just a little while you get to be someone who you're really not.

True, some of the history around Halloween is pagan traditions and the notion is that this is a time when the veil between this world and the next is thin, but that's all tied to our connection to the earth, seasons changing, fertility and life and death. We're part of the earth and divine, after all.

This year through in a full moon, a Blue Moon at that, and that can get people going, especially with the year we've had so far. But then the clocks go back an hour, too, so maybe it's just a reset.

Let's go back to that "pretend to be someone you're not" idea, though, because I think that's something to think about the day after All Hallows Eve. All Saints Day.

Traditionally in the church we've tended to treat saints like figures we're never going to be. They're holy and sacred figures that we put up on a pedestal and somehow they've achieved something that we might aspire to, but we're never going to get. While I think we've always had the best of intentions when it comes to saints, I wonder if we haven't made them something so special and unique that they're unreachable, untouchable and certainly something unattainable. We want them to inspire us and be an example for us, but it seems, instead, that we've put them up on a pedestal, cast them in stone or stained glass, named churches after them and put them out of reach. We make them something we're not and will never be. Just like Jesus, they're out of our league.

It's like when we say we should be like Jesus and we say, well, no, we're never going to achieve that – Jesus was holy and divine. And the whole point of Jesus is that yes, we can, you can. And that ought to be the point of saints, too. Yes, you can.

But all those saints? They're not really out of our league. They're you and me. I think they're just flawed and broken human beings who discovered they were perfect just as they are and, in discovering that, found their connection to both the divine spirit and the earth that's in them. They found good. They found grace, kindness, compassion and love and – here's the important part – lived it. That's what makes them an example. Not an idol.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame comes to mind, thanks be to Disney. Quasimodo is trying to find a clue about where he'd find his beloved Esmerelda. St. Aphrodisius comes alive, steps out of his stained-glass window and sings to Quasimodo, telling his story; talking to him and encouraging him and inspiring him to figure out what the clue means, and he does. The great saint steps down from where put him away and engages the lowly Quasimodo. Good, kindly hearts make a connection.

That's what saints do. They make a connection that inspires good. Don't have to be on a pedestal or a throne, a mountain top or a seat of power. They could be someone you think you should avoid or someone you might not even notice. They could be you.

There's quite a story to St. Aphrodisius, a connection to the Holy Family. Eventually, later, he hears the stories of Jesus and he becomes a Christian.

The thing that sticks out, though, in Hunchback is that the saint stepped out of his window and talked to the lowly Quasimodo. That figure who we put up in that stained-glass window stepped out of the window and down to talk to the one no-one else really wanted to have anything to do with. Except Esmerelda.

If only we could see all the saints that way. As being something we can relate to, as being human that we can relate to, as someone who has a story that we can relate to. Because that's what saints out to be about. That's how they inspire us. That's how they help us connect to potential in ourselves to be better people. It's not a competition. It's not something that we're never going to be able to do. It's something we absolutely can. We just need the right encouragement.

All Saints Day ought to be a day to celebrate the saints that way. Not just the saints of history, but the saints that we meet everyday. Because in fact the saints that we meet everyday are more likely to be like Quasimodo than they are like St. Aphrodisius. They're more likely to be like an ordinary person we'd walk by without even paying any attention to normally. That's the kind of saint we're likely to meet everyday.

And we do. We do meet saints everyday – because we all have the potential to BE saintly, everyday saints everyday. We all have that potential because we’re all children of God, we’re all created in the image of God and of the earth, we’re all divine and human. We’re all capable of that. Of being saintly. Of being momentary, everyday saints like the ones Linnea Good sings about on her album called *Momentary Saints* (that you can find online).

So maybe we can let a little bit of the Halloween spirit of trying to be something or relating to something that you ordinarily aren’t creep into our All Saints day so maybe we can look at saints a little bit more like something we can all be, rather than something we’ll never be.

Two really key words on this day: ALL means all, totally inclusive and SAINTS means all of us human beings, tapping into our potential to be saintly, to be encouraging, to inspire, to be kind, compassionate, human and divine, of the earth and of God.

As if all that isn’t compelling enough, when Martin Luther read the bible he discovered that in the New Testament, the word “saint” is used only to refer to all Christians – as in “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus”. In the New Testament, the word “saint” is never used to refer to the best, most virtuous, or most faithful Christians.

The idea that there is a group of super Christians who are called saints is simply not biblical. So what is a saint? In our context, a saint is a Christian and a Christian is a saint – one who has been made holy by Christ.

And so it is, All Saints Sunday is not a day to celebrate a sort of “Christian Hall of Fame”. Rather, All Saints Day functions as a memorial day, a day to remember all the saints among us and those who’ve gone before us. All the saints. Past and present.

We are all part of the great Community of Saints

As for the Beatitudes in Matthew’s gospel? That is Jesus’ manifesto for transformation in the community he has just inaugurated. They reveal what the community of saints will look like, and what it will behave like, and what it will do – the ways and means by which to engage, love and advance and be in relationship with the whole people of God.

Please join me in a moment of prayer:

God of love and grace, God of justice and hope, God of life, please inspire our hearts and minds with everyone we meet, the great figures of history, the ordinary people we meet on the street, that we might encourage and inspire others, that we might live the life of Jesus every day, for ourselves and the world around us.

May it be so.

Amen.

Meditative/Instrumental Music – *Blest Are They*

(VU p. 896)

Community Prayer

Thank you for witnesses of the faith, O God;
for those who have helped us hear the story of your people,
for the ways the story has touched our lives.

Thank you for the evangelists who have written the gospels;
for the power of their telling.
Thank you for the prophets who have disturbed us;
for their ability to help us examine our living.
Thank you for those people we have known
who have lived out the faith;
for the inspiration they have been to us.
Thank you for the courageous disciples
who have stood up for their beliefs; for their example.
Help us also to be witnesses to the faith.
Let our living be consistent with our preaching.
Help us to be powerful prophets.
Let our work of justice and compassion influence our society.
Help us to be disciples serving and ministering in your name.
Let us convey everywhere the graciousness of your love.
We pray for the saints in our midst . . .
For all your saints, O God, we raise our hallelujahs.

And now, O God, we are one in prayer but bring our own thanks and concerns. If some need to say “help me”, or “save me”, or “hold me”, or “forgive me”, then let these be spoken now in the confidence of our hearts in a moment of quiet prayer.

God in Community, Holy in One,
it is your hope which wipes away every tear,
your grace which restores our souls,
your mercy which makes us one with you,
even as we pray as we have been taught,

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
forever and ever. **Amen.**

Minute for Mission Snippet 2020

Mission & Service partner the Joint Christian Committee for Social Service in Lebanon offers Palestinian refugees aged 11–15

Nov 1: Young Palestinian Refugees
--

a program called Children on the Go. It teaches conflict resolution and offers vocational training.

Joint Christian
Committee for Social
Service in Lebanon

The Life and Work of our Congregation

- Thank you for remembering the work of the church needs your support even as the COVID-19 pandemic prevents us from all worshipping in the sanctuary or meeting in the church. We are grateful that you continue to get your offering to the office by unconventional means.
- *Deep and Wide book study* – books are still available in the office if you'd like to participate in this stewardship study. (I know the theology and some of the attitudes are not to our UCC tastes but the underlying concepts and stewardship practices are worth discussing, do have merit, and are adaptable to our context.) Current thinking is we'll have 3 or 4 sessions, possibly combining Zoom and in-person. As best we can, we'll choose dates and times that accommodate the most people. Anticipate starting after November 8.
- Advent Study – Interested participants – between us we'll settle on either Monday OR Thursday, daytime sessions.
- November Newsletter – Work on the next newsletter is beginning. If you have something to include, please have it to Heather Awmack by Nov 5 either via email to hawmack@yahoo.com, the Awmack family file, or delivered to her house at 1265 Resker Place (off 12th Ave. Target distribution date will be about Nov 19, just before Advent. Thanks for your help in making this newsletter an informative one.
- Canadian Church Calendars – the United Church version is available now from the UCRD Store online.

Commissioning and Benediction

“The world is too dangerous for anything but truth,
and too small for anything but love.” (William Sloane Coffin.)

Go from here, from wherever you are
both challenged and comforted by the Spirit.

Go from here, from wherever you are
surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses.

Go from here, from wherever you are
to praise your Maker while you have breath,
and to love your neighbour as yourself.

Written by Robin Wardlaw.
Gathering, Pentecost 2 2020, page 51.
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The grace of Christ, the love of God,
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

(Sung) Amen (sung at home – unaccompanied)

VU 974

A-men! A-men! Hal-le-lu-jah, amen!