

"The Miracle of Sainthood"

Text: 1 John 3:1-3

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ – that same undeserved love that secured forgiveness for countless sinners and thereby created the Communion of Saints – may that same grace be multiplied to each one of you, together with the loving care of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Dear Fellow Saints:

Would you allow someone to steal something from you if you could prevent it? Depends on the circumstances, doesn't it. If it was something we didn't really care about and someone else needed it, we would probably just offer to give it to them. On the other hand if it was something we valued, we would all probably try to prevent it from being stolen. Hold that thought for a moment.

Now suppose that instead of trying to *steal* something, you saw someone trying to just *destroy* something that had been given to you. They didn't need it or want it; they just wanted to destroy something that you valued. Would you have a problem with that?

Now plug both of those scenarios into the event Christ's Church has historically commemorated on this Sunday and see if anything lights up. Today is All Saints Sunday, and the fact that this once was, but no longer is, an important celebration in the Christian Church tells us something. It tells us that we must not have placed much of a value on the celebration or we would never have allowed it to be stolen by some and destroyed by others. We would never have simply given it away.

The good news is that we can reclaim what was taken from us and, at least in our circles, repair what was damaged. The first step is to get an accurate appraisal to remind us what All Saints Sunday is really worth and therefore just how irresponsible it would be to allow it to be stolen or destroyed.

The text that will guide us in our study and celebration of All Saints Sunday is God's verbally inspired word found recorded in John's First Epistle, beginning with the first verse:

ESV 1 John 3:1-3 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's

children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

This is the Word of God. Think of it! God's own words, recorded and preserved down through the ages so that we also, on this day, might hear and learn from them. That these words would have God's desired effect in our hearts, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth.**" Amen.

God, not man, gets to define his own words and concepts for us. That means that if there is a disagreement on how to understand what a "saint" is, we aren't supposed to argue opinions. We are supposed to look in our Bibles to see how God defines this or any other word. According to one branch of the Christian Church, a saint is someone who dies with more good works than sins, and who therefore has *earned* the right to go straight to heaven without having to spend time in purgatory. In other words, according to this view there are relatively few saints. (In fact we would argue that if this actually were God's definition of a saint, there wouldn't be *few*; there would be *none at all*.) We too define a saint as one who has no sins on their account and who will therefore spend no time in purgatory but go straight to their Savior's side when they die. The key difference is that we believe that Christ, not man, paid for all of our sins on the cross of Calvary, and that full and complete forgiveness is the personal possession of every *single believer*. There are, in other words, *innumerable* saints, since every Christian is a saint.

Those are the two different ideas or positions, but who is right? God, obviously. All we therefore need to do to settle the question is to look in our Bibles to find God's definition of the word he himself coined.

When Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans, he began with these words: "**To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**" Notice that all who are loved by God are called to be saints. Nor was this a unique greeting, since when Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth he began: "**To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:**" ³ **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**" And in his Second Letter to Corinth: "**Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the church of God**

that is at Corinth, with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia:
² ¶ **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**" The same with his letters to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. Since God the Holy Spirit did not intend that all of these inspired writings would address only a select few in each of these cities, it is clear that God himself defines a saint as anyone and everyone who has been brought to saving faith in Jesus Christ. Every Christian is therefore a saint.

The Holy Spirit through Paul also gave us additional evidence through this timeless word of encouragement in Romans 8: "**And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.**"²⁸ ¶ **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**" Saints, we here learn, are all those "**who love God... who are called according to his purpose.**"

In fact God's definition of a saint is itself a definition of the gospel and a refutation of work righteousness. It is absurd to imagine that all of the Christians in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica had more good works than sins, and yet God calls them saints – literally "holy ones." And yet only one who has no sins in God's eyes could be called a "holy one" by God. The only possible explanation is therefore that holiness is not earned by man; it is credited to him because of the actions of another – Jesus Christ. Paul didn't say that every citizen in all of those cities was a saint, just those to whom he addressed his letters. What made them different? Faith. Were the Christians in those cities better human beings than all of their neighbors – morally superior as the world reckons such things? Of course not. Every Christian in Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica was regarded by God as a "holy one" (a saint) because of their faith in Jesus Christ.

So then we have God's definition of a saint. It is one who has no sin in God's sight. Yet since most in our society don't define saint in this way, would it be a mistake to continue celebrating All Saints Day? Is the damage just too great to ever be repaired? Do we run the risk of doing more damage than good by celebrating what has been so thoroughly perverted? The answer – and we need to hear this well – is that this commemoration is worth it because our God is worth it.

Remember the direction arrow is never supposed to be reversed in our worship services. It always and only points to God. He alone sits on the throne and he alone is supposed to be the focal point for this and every

other holiday. He is to be the center or heart of all that we do. Consider how we end each Lord's Prayer: "...**For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever.**" Those are not just words; they are facts. The words rightly say "*For thine IS...*" not "*should be...*" Nor are they exaggerations. They are actually *understated* truths. They are *understated* in that mortal human beings really cannot fully comprehend just how worthy our immortal God is of our praise and adoration in absolutely every aspect of life. Since "**every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father...**" it is then also true that that same God is worthy of thanksgiving, praise, and honor for an infinite number of big and little things in our lives every single day.

Why should All Saint's Day be any different? On this day we sing the praises of our God for the grace given to all the believers who have been brought to, preserved, and carried home in the one true, saving faith. Think for just a moment about how precious and commendable such a celebration really is. Once you get past the notion that a saint is a human being with more good works than sins, and once you remember that this celebration is directed towards God rather than man, then you recognize that nothing could be more natural than to celebrate God's victories in connection with every single saved sinner.

In fact we do ourselves a great disservice when we fail to make a big deal about the rescue of even *one sinner*. Why is this such a great disservice? Because it *is* a big deal. Every single Christian who dies in the faith is an eternal victory over humanly insurmountable odds.

Are you having trouble grasping the magnitude of the victory of every saved sinner? Think about it in these terms. Every single one of us started our lives as a spiritual failure. The deck, as it were, was stacked against us. We had lost before we even started because we were born "**dead in trespasses and sins.**" In fact this is one of the clearest truths taught in Scripture. We could never keep God's command to be holy because we were *born* sinful. Even the youngest child here this morning was born "**dead in trespasses and sins.**" Hardly seems fair, does it? We also understand that human beings have added a never-ending succession of sins to those with which we were born. Original (birth) sin sealed our doom before we even took our first breath, but every one of us did more than enough to condemn ourselves even without original sin. Still God rescued us.

What is even more remarkable about the salvation of any sinner has to do with the enemies we face. How can any human being possibly do

battle against an enemy that we can't even see. Even worse, apart from Jesus Christ, we don't even have any weapons that could possibly be effective in such a struggle. Even *worse yet* is the fact that this unseen, indefensible enemy has a traitorous ally that remains inside every human being - our own sinful flesh. In other words, there is a part of each one of us (our old Adam or sinful flesh) that actually *sides with Satan*.

Makes one wonder how could things get any worse? It can, since we also acknowledge a total inability for any sinner to choose the right path to heaven. Add to that the fact that there is only one path – through faith in Jesus Christ – together with the fact that *someone else* has to show us that path (we cannot find it on our own) and then the Holy Spirit has to work through that message of salvation to bring us to faith. All that, and that's just the start. From that point on, and every single day of our lives, the devil and his allies will try to rob us of the saving faith that we have been given. If I had no one but myself to stand guard, the fortress of my human heart would certainly and quickly fall.

How in the world then can anyone at all ever be brought to faith, let alone kept or preserved in that faith? **Thanks be to God, who gives us such a victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!** Only God could do something that great, which is why our God most certainly is worthy of eternal praise, honor, and glory for every single sinner he rescues from an eternity in hell and blesses instead with immortality in heaven.

Return finally to our text. It's really only when we are brought up to speed on the miracle of salvation for even one single human being that we begin to hear the opening verse of our text as we should: **See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.** Our first Scripture reading from the Book of Revelation introduces all believers with these words: **"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence."** That's you and me. That's every single sinner who has been brought to and preserved in the saving faith. That's the Holy Christian Church – the very bride of the Lamb, Jesus Christ.

There's still more cause for celebration. While we have even now been washed clean and given life, the best is still to come. So says our text: **Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.**

Our God has done this for us. Now we stand holy and sinless in his sight. *Then*, we will personally experience the incredible, utterly amazing transformation of all who die in faith. Countless thousands have already been rescued, and are now asleep in the perfect comfort of their Lord's enfolded arms, awaiting God's Day of Judgment. You know and love many of them. Will you be among them? With Jesus as your Savior, you need have no doubt that your place too has been secured. God help us to appreciate our privileged place among the Communion of Saints, and to celebrate our rescue with praise and gratitude. Amen.

Scripture Reading

ESV Revelation 7:9-17 After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands,¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,¹² saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."¹³ ¶ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?"¹⁴ I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.¹⁵ "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat.¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

ESV Matthew 5:1-12 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.² And he opened his mouth 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 shall be comforted.⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.¹¹ ¶ "Blessed are you when others 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 so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mark Johnson, President

Eileen McEnroe, Head Organist

Michael Roehl, Pastor

Today's Organist: Eileen McEnroe

All Saints Sunday – November 5, 2017

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 463 (Verses 1-2, 4-5) (*Red Hymnal*)

"For All the Saints Who from Their Labors Rest"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (*Brown Hymnal*)

The Scripture Lessons: (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

The Epistle Lesson: (Revelation 7:9-17) How tragically ironic that being known by the One True God means that we are unknown by the world. One day, all will be revealed and the truth will be irrefutable and obvious. The visions revealed to John and recorded in the Book of Revelation are intended to give Christians of all times and cultures the comfort of knowing that no matter how dark and foreboding and no matter how powerful the forces of evil and unbelief, God's Children win in the end. The prize is heaven. God preserve us to that end.

Psalm 121 (Supplement page 42) (*Brown Hymnal*)

The New Testament Lesson: (Matthew 5:1-12) A saint is rightly defined as one who has no sin in God's eyes. All Christians are therefore saints, since God has placed all of our sins on Jesus and therefore sees them no more. Yet there are other characteristics of God's children of which we ought to be aware. Several were outlined by Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (*Brown Hymnal page 15*)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn - 467 (Verses 1-4) (*Red Hymnal*)

"Built on the Rock the Church doth Stand"

The Sermon – 1 John 3:1-3 (*Printed on the back page of this bulletin*)

"The Miracle of Sainthood"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 467 (Verses 5-7) (*Red Hymnal*)

"Built on the Rock the Church doth Stand"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 463 (Verses 6-8) (*Red Hymnal*)

"For All the Saints Who from Their Labors Rest"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (38) Ave (40) October Mortgage Balance (\$29,428)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	- 9:00 a.m.	- Sunday school and Bible Class
	- 10:00 a.m.	- Worship Service
	- 11:00 a.m.	- Fellowship and coffee time
Wednesday	- 6:00 p.m.	- Confirmation Class
	- 7:00 p.m.	- Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	- 9:00 a.m.	- Sunday school and Bible Class
	- 10:00 a.m.	- Worship Service w/Communion
	- 11:15 a.m.	- Fellowship and coffee time
	- 5:00 p.m. (MT)	- Installation of Pastor Weis in Lemmon

CLC News – Pastor Andrew Schaller is considering the call to Immanuel of Mankato. Pastor Mark Weis is scheduled to be installed as pastor of St. Luke's of Lemmon in a 5pm Mountain (6pm CST) service next Sunday, November 12. A fellowship meal is scheduled to follow.

Pastor Weis Installation – It would be encouraging to our sister congregation in Lemmon to support them by attending their installation service next Sunday. Pastor Roehl is scheduled to conduct the installation and has room for two passengers. If others plan to attend, please make that known so we can coordinate rides.

Looking Ahead – Our annual Thanksgiving celebration is scheduled for Wednesday, November 22 at 7:00 pm. That service is followed on the next three Wednesdays by our midweek Advent services.

Church Christmas Party – The date for our annual Church Christmas party is Saturday, December 2, beginning at 6:00pm. There are attendance and food sign-up sheets on the mailbox table.

CLC Contractors – The maintenance department at Immanuel College has again requested that anyone with expertise in any area of maintenance or construction send them your contact information. They would solicit a bid from you if a project comes up in your field of expertise. You will also be able to indicate if you would be available for consulting services. See Pastor Roehl for more details.