

"Remembering & Rituals"

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"Remembering & Rituals" | Ephesians 1:11-19 | Pastor Megan Berry

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory.

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

Thanks be to God for these words of scripture.

All Saints Day is a beautiful and hard day full of rituals and big feelings. As we explore All Saints and our scripture, I want to remind you again to be mindful of your body and your feelings, let grief express itself. If you need some sample prayers to help, I invite you to check out this past Friday's connection email! There's 2 breath prayers and a blessing for you to use as you find them helpful.

One of the beautiful parts of our scripture and reminders of this day is that we are all saints and we all obtain the inheritance of God. We don't have to be martyred or do something incredibly amazing to be a part of God's inheritance and considered a saint. Our passage reminds us that God is glorified by the ordinary and holy lives of believers of every age.

Our scripture also reminds us that we are all connected to one another, that we don't do this work alone, rather we have the strength of one another in this room and we have the strength and traditions of the saints who went before us to lean on and learn from.

As we remember the saints of our lives, we're not holding them up as perfect, holy people. We're holding them up as the imperfect saints that they were and that we are. And we're

learning what was good and what could be better while continuing to do this incredible work of being Christians and being God's people together.

For example, some of you have probably heard me joke that my mother was a saint. And I frequently use that language when retelling a story of how snotty my brothers and I were and how we put our parents through the ringer with some of our antics. And while typically said flippantly, I do believe my mother is a saint. She was incredibly loving and kind, she taught me how to rely on God and not be too pessimistic about life. She showed me the importance of community and giving back in different ways. She was pretty cool, but I'm a little biased.

She also was nowhere near as perfect as these 3 sentences make her out to be. She got angry with us and would say hurtful things, she could be incredibly judgmental of those who were different from her, she was very human. She had amazing qualities and some not so great qualities, as do I, as do we all. And as I remember her, I do my best to equip myself with her good qualities, to honor her and to continue doing this hard and good work.

So as we think about the saints of our lives, as we wrestle with today, I want to remind you that it's good to be incredibly human, to make mistakes and try to do better next time. It's okay if we look at some of the saints of our past and say "God bless you, but I want to do things a little different." All of those feelings are more than allowed, because we all have incredibly good qualities and some not good qualities, we are human after all.

But our passage doesn't just stop at reminding us that we are all saints and obtaining God's inheritance. It also reminds us of one of the best and hardest lessons of scripture: we are ALL unified in Christ, we are ALL beloved children of God. I don't know about you all, but I often struggle these days to find unity or common ground with EVERYONE who claims to be a Christian.

And while there are legitimate concerns and reasons to be wary of some people, we're going to take the extremists out of the equation right now. This unity in Christ is pointing to a very basic calling that hopefully we can all agree upon across denominational lines, across generational lines, across all the lines that show us how we are different rather than how we are unified. That unity and calling is to love God and to love one another. We are united in Christ together and we are united in loving God and one another together, with those in the room and the saints across the ages.

I know I too often get caught up in the nitty gritty and think "well their advocacy doesn't look like mine" or "they prefer this social justice issue and OBVIOUSLY we should be working on this other issue" that I draw lines in the unity of Christ when we should be focused on loving God and loving one another.

Because we are called to love ALL people, those we love and agree with and those whom we struggle to love and agree with.

And you might be thinking “great, cool, but Megan I am burnt out, I am tired, I am grieving, I don’t want to do this, I don’t have the energy to do this!” And hear me say, that is okay. We all have periods where we’re tired, burnt out, grieving, and need to take a step back from being 100% on top of everything.

And that’s also where I want to remind you to draw strength from your memories, to draw strength from the rituals and traditions of your own life and of the church.

One of the beautiful parts of All Saints Day for me is the importance of the rituals we have in worship. We have candles available to be lit in honor of loved ones, we read the names of all the saints in this congregation who have died this past year, we celebrate communion together and remember God’s abundance for us all. It’s a day ripe with rituals that connect us to one another, to God, and to the saints of our lives no matter when they died.

Part of the importance of rituals is the grounding effect it can have on our bodies and minds to do the same thing over and over again. While sometimes it can feel like you’re going through the motions, other times it might be the grounding moment you need to reconnect with yourself, with God, and take the next step forward.

This is part of why we encourage spiritual practices like praying or reading your Bible or unplugging from the world for a bit. Not because you need to check mark the box to be a good Christian, but because life is overwhelming, over stimulating, and just a lot. And these practices, these rituals, can be that pause for our bodies and spirits to reconnect, to check in, to be ready for the incredibly hard and lovely work of loving our neighbors and continuing the work of all the wonderful saints who came before us and who will continue to come after us.

Wherever you are on the spectrum of emotions today, I hope you take some time to remember a saint of your life or the church, to give thanks for all of the amazing work they did to glorify God and take a deep breath, ready to face the next steps that you will take to glorify God. Amen.