

November 6, 2016



## "DISCIPLE: Affirm Hope"

Fall Sanctuary Worship Sermon Series – No. 10

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

*Ephesians 1:13-23*

*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. I pray 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 know 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. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*

"I pray that God may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation—so that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know the hope to which God has called you, the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints..."

We pray that God's spirit of wisdom and revelation this morning might open our eyes and the eyes of our hearts to see the glorious cloud of witnesses on this All Saints Sunday. Oh, we can easily look around and see the present-day saints as we worship together this morning. But I'm talking now about those who have gone on ahead, those who sat in these pews before many of us were even born, those who dreamed of a church and lived lives of steady faithfulness. I want us to see this morning the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints.

Because, though they have now gone home to be with God they are never far from us, as close to our hearts as a breath and prayer. They cheer us on, they comfort us, they reassure us. And we are rich in the inheritance of their faith and their love. They persevered in hope through the darkest times and they gave thanks to God in times of plenty, times of joy.

Saints are "blessed-by-God" people and this first Sunday in November each year we carry forward the ancient church custom of giving thanks for those who have gone ahead of us. Those who walked the walk, talked the talk. Those who lived their faith as best they could. And shared it with us and passed it on, generation to generation. They are "our saints," in the sense that the earliest Christians called one another sancti—holies. People who carry the light of God.

This year we've added our beautiful white ribbons in what I hope will become part of our tradition. I want to thank Shalimar Carducci on our staff for bringing this idea to us. The presence of the saints is made more visible and we lift them up in our hearts.

Many of us grew up in Christian households and Christian families. We can think of our own parents and grandparents as among those saints who taught us what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus. Not that they were perfect, don't you know. But they were "blessed-by-God" people, sancti, holies, who gave us clues about faith and how it's the glue that holds us together, how it's the source of strength in the present, how faith opens the door to a future bright with hope.

Not all of us grew up in the church. Some came along with friends in high school or college. Some of us, it's so amazing to me, just sort of wandered in on your own, and found something that had been missing in your heart, and you sat down and decided to stay awhile. I know there are those of you who then turned around and invited your parents and others to come along, too.

No matter how you got here, the saints were here first. In fact, you are sitting in their pew spot this morning. They were here first, and they'll be here long after. Generation upon generation. They just keep praying us home. So relax, church. What you see is not all of what you get.

This means that as individuals making our way through this life, we are never alone, no matter how lonely or challenging some chapters of our life can be.

When the world and all its craziness and ugliness seems almost too much to bear, this day and these beautiful ribbons remind us that we are part of something big and beautiful and strong and good and full of hope. Each

one is part of something big and wide and everywhere and forever—the community of saints, the family of God connected across time and place.

God has given us a priceless inheritance which can never be taken from us, a unity in Christ that overcomes all divisions, a community of love and faith that stretches farther back in time than we can see and farther ahead than we can make out clearly just yet. God has given us a future with hope. And as a congregation, challenged to live out the faith in a time of white-water change, we have a priceless inheritance, the immeasurable greatness of God's power. Our God names us and loves us and calls us to a future with hope.

In a moment we will lift up the names of our congregation who have gone home to be with God this year, and then the names of those near and dear to us. May this commemoration, and the sacrament of Holy Communion which follows, uniting us with them in the presence of the living Christ, be for us a power surge this morning. In the company of the great cloud of witnesses, all the saints, may we sit a little straighter, breathe a little deeper, plant our feet firmly on the ground, lift our eyes to the skies, and our hearts up to heaven. May we feel in our bones the hope to which we are called in the immeasurable greatness of God's power and everlasting love.

“I pray that God may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation—so that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know the hope to which God has called you, the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints...”

Alleluia! Amen.

Notes:

The DISCIPLE sermon series is drawn from the work of Martin Thielen in *A Preacher's Guide to Lectionary Sermon Series*. Compiled by Jessica Miller Kelley. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016.