

Rev. Danny Mackey  
All Saints' Day (Observed)  
November 4, 2018  
Matthew 5:1-12  
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

*"It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God."*

Congregations, like human beings, are born, live, and grow old. A very different congregation once filled these pews. 80 years ago people walked to church, walked to work, walked to school, walked to the store. Now we drive—even some farmers and pastors drive to work. That says it all. Muncie was filled with factories and bustling with activity. We still have some factories, but not as many. The Ball family left in the late '90s. Borg-Warner in the aughts. Years ago, I've been told, gangsters would come down from Chicago and socialize here. The Village and its little boutiques were where you did your Christmas shopping. A lot has changed. In fact, a photograph taken of the congregation from the pulpit today would be different from a picture 30 years ago. A picture taken from the back of the pews toward the chancel would be just as different.

Faces we thought we would never forget have faded away. Pastors and people are constantly changing, but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Since the Church is His body, she also stays the same. Perhaps a church that advertises itself as "contemporary" is no church at all. The true Church has one Baptism and she partakes of the one spiritual food in the Holy Sacrament. She reads the same Scriptures, hears the same Gospel, and sings the same liturgies and hymns. St. Paul said there is one Church, one Spirit, one Lord Jesus, and one God and Father of all.

Change is a fact of life in this world whether we like it or not. And we Lutherans should be the last ones to complain about change. Rarely was there ever a change like the Lutheran Reformation. It was a disruption of magnificent proportions! One day the Church was Catholic, the next she was Protestant. The Pope lost his power as a world ruler and for many he no longer had the last word. Thanks to Luther, the people no longer watched the church services, but actually participated in them. Preaching was brought back. Latin was out; and the language spoken by all was in. People could actually understand what was going on. If there hadn't been change, there would have been no Reformation and we

wouldn't be Lutherans. The Pope has never forgiven Luther. He remains excommunicated. Still, even that could change as part of a PR stunt. It isn't likely, and we'd know better than to buy it.

All Saints' Day is not about change; it's about how things stay the same. It's not about one congregation or even the Lutheran Church, but about a Church that exists everywhere and at all times. This Church is eternal. She has her origin in the mind of God and is firmly established in the heavens. This Church doesn't pine for the good ol' times of the past and doesn't hope for better times in the future. Her future glory is already her possession. The kingdom of God is present in this Church right now. This kingdom belongs as much to the present as it does to the past or the future. Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs *is* the kingdom of the heavens." Right now. What the Church hopes for is already present in the preaching of Christ's cross and His Sacraments. The Gospel tells us that the kingdom of the heavens is coming, and in the Sacraments that kingdom comes. The kingdom of the heavens, which Jesus said belonged to the poor in spirit, is nothing else than Christ's taking on flesh by the Virgin Mary, His death for our salvation, His rising from the tomb, and His glorious ascension into heaven.

He reigns over us and all the world. Thus, this kingdom has no political boundaries and flies no national flags. She belongs to neither Republican nor Democratic nor Libertarian nor any other party. She gives her allegiance to no earthly ruler. She speaks countless languages but says and confesses one thing: Christ and Him crucified for sinners. The boundaries of this one holy, catholic, Christian, and apostolic Church are established by Holy Baptism. She feeds on the Holy Communion. This Church is everywhere in the world: "It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God." One church building comes down and another is built. One church has 20 members; another has thousands. But there is still only one Church. No time or place is superior to another. "It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, holy Lord, almighty Father, everlasting God."

You are God's Church. You are Christ's body. You are the Holy Spirit's temple. You are the work of the Holy Trinity who lives within you. You're not an afterthought. You belong to God's one eternal decision. He elected you in Christ, and He gave you Christ's holiness.

When you confess, “I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic church,” you are saying two things: first, that Christ is holy; and second, that the Church to which you belong by Baptism is holy. You are not holy in yourself, but only because you are part of the Church.

From our own experience we know that we are not as good as God says we are. We might try to find ourselves in the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God,” but we have a more difficult time finding ourselves in the last beatitude, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake.” Some are persecuted for the sake of Christ. We rarely are and, if we are, it doesn’t involve a torturous death. Usually just a rude word or a nasty look. Compared to the men and women who confessed Christ and paid the price with their lives and fortunes, we don’t want to call ourselves saints—at least, not in the same extraordinary sense that they are. God equally justifies all Christians through faith on account of Christ. But it’s also true that God has accomplished more through some people than others.

God shows equality in salvation, but not in how He works. God is no equal-opportunity employer. We’re only kidding ourselves if any of us think we are a St. Peter or Paul or Luther. I may stumble through this or that sermon on one Sunday or another, but Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John by the Holy Spirit gave us the Gospels, which are read in all the churches of God everywhere throughout the world, Sunday after Sunday, year after year, one century upon another. And after they wrote their Gospels, they sealed their books with their blood. We are dry creeks. Those saints are still roaring rivers rushing to the ocean.

The first apostles carried the Gospel throughout the ancient world. Then came the missionary apostles who went further. They left homes; they preached the Gospel and then paid for what they preached with their lives. If St. Patrick hadn’t gone to Ireland, if those Irish monks had not gone to Scotland and England, if St. Olaf had not gone to Norway, if St. Boniface had not gone to barbarous Germans who threatened to kill him, if Sts. Cyril and Methodius had not gone to the Slovak nations, if the Spanish priests in Columbus’s day hadn’t gone to Latin America, if the Russian prince Vladimir hadn’t adopted Christianity, we would not be Christians. We are only Christians because of the Holy Spirit, but that Spirit worked through men and women who sacrificed themselves to God. Of these people Jesus said, “For great is [their] reward in heaven.” We make no claims for ourselves or for our

faith but are as dependent on the Church as the paralytic was on those who carried him on the stretcher to Jesus to be healed.

Now let's speak about ordinary Christians like us. We are all together packaged in one large bundle. We don't belong on November 1<sup>st</sup>, All Saints' Day. That's for the really important people. We belong on the next day, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, All Souls' Day, with all those Christians who struggle with sin, doubt, and unbelief. We won't be remembered very long—but we are content that God remembers us. Our hope is that our names are written in heaven. We are that Church which is redeemed by Christ. We are at peace with God and with one another. We are that Church which exists in, with, and under Jesus Christ. We are on earth, but we have already been taken into heaven with Jesus Christ to God's right hand. We who are alive have already died with Christ in Holy Baptism, given His seal of the resurrection and the life everlasting. Those who have died—Steve Ludwig, Paul Hummel, Virginia Lucas, Larry Koss, Barbara Waller, Martha Eckelman, Evelyn Rector, and all those who have gone before us—are alive in Christ. Death is no boundary for us, because all are joined in the one body of Christ.

In this Church, Jesus is the foundation and around His altar are the Old Testament priests, prophets, kings and patriarchs, all the apostles, evangelists, and the martyrs. Most of us will be in the back rows of heaven. But that's just fine by me. For wherever we are in heaven, its beauty and majesty will be beyond anything we can imagine, beyond all human expression. And we will be gathered with all the saints, partaking together the unchanging feast of our God.

In Jesus' Name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus + to life everlasting.