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Providence Presbyterian Church
All Saints Day
November 1, 2026
I John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

"For All the Saints"

A little boy and his father were exploring a church noted for its beautiful stained-glass windows. Indeed, as they walked up and down the aisles, they were amazed at the beauty of the glass depictions of the saints of the church. “Do you know who the saints of the church are?” the father asked his son.“ “Sure,” replied the son, “the saints are the people the sun shines through.”

Out of the mouths of babes.... comes a good working definition of a saint - someone through whom the Son shines. On this All Saints Day, we celebrate by remembering all those through whom Jesus Christ shined in such a way that our path has been illuminated. Our remembrance of the saints includes not only the more obvious saints of the church, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Paul, and St. Peter, but also the less notable saints of the church, whose names we will commemorate.

The fact that we call them saints does not mean that they were necessarily saintly. It means that they were disciples of Jesus Christ, like us, doing the best they could to follow Jesus. They weren’t perfect. But they are a part of the foundation of our lives and our church.

This whole idea of being surrounded by the saints may seem a bit strange to us because we are what the sociologist Margaret Mead called, “Neophiles,” that is, “lovers of the new.” We adore the new and improved model of everything. In fact, this infatuation with the new leads many in society to be prejudiced against history and tradition. In a traditional, agricultural society, the elders have a lot to teach the young. The elders are the repository of generations of received wisdom about seedtime and harvest, the changes of the weather and the cyclical rhythms of nature.

But in a technological society, the older generation seemingly have nothing to teach the young. Technology renders the older generations apparently ignorant. How many of us have said, “I have to ask my grandchild how to operate my TV, Phone or Computer?” These days, an elementary school child knows far more about computers than those of us who are over sixty.

In a society where the roles are reversed and the young teach the old, it's easy to see why society has developed an attitude of, "Who cares about yesterday?" What this prejudice against the past accounts for is the often-superficial nature of our society. When a generation thinks that it has nothing to learn from the past, it must forever re-create the wheel, morally, spiritually and intellectually.

This is where the teachings of Jesus help us value the past in the present for the future. Jesus saw the crowds who were following him and sat down on the side of a hill and began to teach them what we today call the Beatitudes – the Blessings. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake." These are qualities that we who follow Jesus should embody.

But that is an uphill battle in a world that rejects humility, empathy, justice, peace and mercy. And yet, these are characteristics that I would guess were embodied by those we choose to remember this morning as saints of our lives. We recall with love and respect those who lived faithful lives and did their best to follow Jesus' commands and teachings. We honor those who demonstrated a way of being that was counter-cultural. Those we admire had the right attitudes to be followers of Jesus – Jesus told them and us the attitudes needed to be his disciple – they were the way-Be-Attitudes. When we exemplify the Be Attitudes, we too will be numbered among the saints of the church.

In many ways, the church is one of the last bastions of tradition and history in society. I know that some outside the church make fun of the "antiquated" way we do things - using the outdated language of scripture and prayer, singing hymns that are older than our nation, reserving Sundays as a day of worship and rest, and promoting fellowship with Cornhole tournaments and pie potlucks.

The church is slow to change for a good reason - many of our traditions are worth keeping and if we succumb to the temptation to chase after the new, we will quickly lose valuable traditions. Lately we have begun using the Apostles' Creed in worship on communion Sundays as an affirmation of our basic Christian beliefs and we sing the Doxology as our last hymn as a way of giving praise to God alone and connecting with our spiritual forbears.

My one and only experience with acting came in the musical, South Pacific. I remember how nervous I was the first time I went on stage on opening night. I also remember the encouragement I received from all those who were backstage. They reassured me that I would do fine.

That is the role of the saints of the church. They are the backstage encouragers of us who are on stage before God. We are surrounded by the saints, who put their time and talents into the church, and who want to see us grow and prosper.

Years ago on Palm Sunday, Ellie and I had the privilege of worshiping at Notre Dame in Chartres, France. Worship began with the bishop leading a palm processional of hundreds of people from outside the church into the sanctuary. As we were being seated my eye caught a beautiful stone tableau which depicted Palm Sunday. There was Jesus leading the processional, with lots of people following behind. And there we were, in our own processional.

That's when it struck me - that is what it's like anytime we enter the church. To come into church is to take our place in a centuries-long procession. First comes Jesus and those who first encountered him. Then comes the succeeding generations of followers. And finally comes us, blending in with the whole procession. We are caught up in a two-thousand-year procession, surrounded by the saints of the church, who encourage us in our discipleship.

One time, Ellie and I visited Washington D. C. Of all the sights we saw, the most memorable was the Vietnam Memorial. It is a long, partially buried, polished black granite wall, on which are inscribed the names of the fifty-thousand plus Americans who died in the Vietnam War. I was not expecting to be impressed by the wall, but I was moved to tears by the sight of those names. Thousands upon thousands of names stretching from one end of the wall to the other.

As I stood there, looking at the names, searching for high school classmates and others, I suddenly realized that I was seeing my own face reflected in the black granite. There, among the names of the dead, was my reflection.

In a way, that is what All Saints Day is like. We remember the saints. Not just the notable martyrs, but our Sunday School teachers, our parents, our spouses, our aunts, uncles and grandparents, our preachers and all the others who have preceded us in the church and in the faith. And as we remember their names, we see ourselves reflected in them. We join them in the Christian procession down through the ages, taking our place alongside them.

We gather around this table with them and break bread and drink wine with them in communion with our Lord Jesus Christ. Truly, we are surrounded by the saints, who are backstage encouragers for our discipleship to Jesus Christ. Today we thank God for all the saints who cheer us on in our efforts to follow Jesus Christ.

In a very real sense, we have inherited our faith from all the saints who have laid the foundation for all we do as we love God with all our heart, soul and mind and love our

neighbor as ourselves. Today is for all the saints who have gone before us, showing us the way to be followers of Jesus by demonstrating the Way-To-Be-Attitudes he taught us.
In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Charge: Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God will equip you. God will accomplish a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells within you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in God's grace, love and power. Amen