



A SERMON

by Rev. Marcella Auld Glass: November 2, 2025



TODAY IS THE SUNDAY WE CELEBRATE ALL SAINTS' DAY. In early Christian tradition, saints' days began as a way to mark the anniversary of a martyr's death—his or her “birthday” as a saint. By the middle of the church's first millennium, there were so many martyrs (particularly due to the persecution of Diocletian) that it was hard to give them all their due. All Saints' Day was established as an opportunity to honor all the saints, known and unknown. All Saints' Day has been celebrated on November 1 since the year 835. All Saints' Day has a rather different focus in the Reformed tradition. While we may give thanks for the lives of particular individual saints of ages past, like Mother Teresa or Mister Rogers, in the Presbyterian Church, the emphasis is on the ongoing sanctification

of the *whole* people of God.

Rather than putting saints on pedestals as holy people set apart in glory, we give glory to God for the ordinary, holy lives of the believers in this and every age. Today we will give thanks for members of the congregation, and for other friends of Calvary, like people who participate in our Tuesday Senior's program, who have died in the past year.

All Saints' is also a moment for us to remember the saints in our lives who have shaped our journeys—parents, friends, Sunday school teachers, etc—offering gratitude for those whose shoulders we stand upon today.

To celebrate All Saints' is rejoice with all the faithful of every generation and it expands our awareness of a great cloud of witnesses, to use language from the Book of Hebrews. It lifts us out of a preoccupation with our own immediate situation and the discouragements of the present. In the knowledge that others have persevered, we are encouraged to endure against all odds (Hebrews 12:1-2). Reminded that God was with the faithful of the past, we are reassured that God is with us today, moving us and all creation toward God's end in time.

On All Saints' Day, we remember with gratitude our ancestors in faith here at Calvary, the members of Calvary over the past 171 years, whose faithfulness and generosity built this beautiful home for our worship, who built the foundation that undergirds and strengthens our ministry and witness today. To celebrate All Saints' Day is also to remember our responsibility to be the Saints who provide for future generations.

We've shared this quote before, and this won't be the last time. Adam Grant writes, “It's more important to be good ancestors than dutiful descendants. Too many people spend their lives being custodians of the past instead of stewards of the future. We worry about making our parents proud when we should be focused on making our children proud. The responsibility of each generation is not to please our predecessors—it's to improve conditions for our successors.” — Adam M. Grant, [Hidden Potential: The Science of Achieving Greater Things](#)

It is not a bad idea to be a dutiful descendant. And perhaps the best way to do so is to be a good ancestor. The way we honor our past is to care for the future.

As we enter worship this morning, I invite you to pause and think about the saints of your life. Maybe they were present to and for you in lots of ways, like parents and grandparents. Maybe they were in your life only for a moment or a short season, but were angels to you when you needed them most.

Frederick Buechner writes:

“On All Saints' Day, it is not just the saints of the church
that we should remember in our prayers,
but all the foolish ones and wise ones,
the shy ones and overbearing ones,
the broken ones and whole ones,
the despots and tosspots and crackpots of our lives who,
one way or another, have been
our particular fathers and mothers and saints,
and whom we loved without knowing we loved them
and by whom we were helped
to whatever little we may have,
or ever hope to have,
of some kind of seedy sainthood of our own.”

As we worship this morning, may we feel surrounded by the love and care of our saints, known and unknown.

Matthew 5:14-16

'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.'

TODAY'S PASSAGE IS SHORTER THAN OUR USUAL SCRIPTURE READINGS. And if you worship here regularly, you may have noticed that we've jumped to Matthew, leaving our Narrative Lectionary readings in the Old Testament. We'll go back there next week, but today is Stewardship Sunday, when we dedicate our pledges for the coming year, and this passage is where the theme—**Give Light to the World**—originated.

More than that, though, this passage has been coming to mind for me all year as I think about who we are as a church. I'll get to that in a minute.

This passage is near the end of what we refer to as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It takes place fairly early in his ministry. Jesus has been baptized by John in the Jordan River, then taken to the wilderness where Satan tried to tempt him with worldly power and wealth (probably a crypto scheme). Jesus rebukes the tempter, saying we are to worship God alone, and not wealth or power, and he leaves the wilderness to begin preaching this message: **"Repent! For the kingdom of God has come near"**.

Jesus calls his disciples and then we're told *"Jesus* went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news* of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people."*²⁴ *So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.*²⁵ *And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan."*

And it is at this moment—when Jesus is a rock star, when huge crowds surround him wherever he goes, asking for selfies and autographs, when he's famous throughout what today we'd call Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon—it is at this moment that he preaches the sermon on the mount, where he talks about how it is the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness who are the ones who are blessed, the ones we should be caring for, not the ones we should be reviling.

The Sermon on the Mount was as countercultural then as it is today. We still give honor and accord to wealth and status. We still shame and judge the poor. If you listen to the voices on the news this past week, criticizing the 42 million people in our country who lost access to food support yesterday because of the government shut down, we can see that 'blessed are the poor' is not something our elected leaders agree with Jesus about.

I was a child whose family received the SNAP equivalent benefits in the 1970s when my dad went blind and could not work. Getting free lunch at school did not make me a moocher. It fed me so I could learn and grow up to try to be a productive member of society. I am thankful for the support we received. It is both a gift and a duty to offer support for others and to create a world where nobody is hungry.

San Francisco, in a public/private partnership at the leading of the mayor and supervisors, is covering benefits for people in SF for now, but we may yet be called upon as a congregation to offer assistance for our Matthew 25 partners who provide safety net coverage for the most vulnerable in our community. Stay tuned.

Following Jesus and his call to care for others will put us at odds with the world around us that offers tax cuts for billionaires and ballrooms at the White House while children go hungry.

Jesus could have taken his moment of popularity and the adulation of the crowds and used it to preach a sermon for his benefit, offering to sell them autographed bibles or something. Instead, his sermon on the mount lifts up the most vulnerable and calls them blessed.

He tells them the Kingdom of Heaven has come near to them, which means that there are no corners of their lives that are separate from God's kingdom. To say the Kingdom of Heaven has come near is to say that we can't separate our Sunday faith from our Monday to Saturday lives. God's Kingdom has come near to us and the values of God's Kingdom are where we live each and every day.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

This is the context for the verses we heard this morning.

And I confess that normally, I do not gravitate toward this 'city on a hill' business. In my experience, the people who like to throw around that phrase often use it to glorify themselves.

And 'letting your light shine before others' was not encouraged in my family. I mean, I wasn't raised to snuff out my light entirely, but I did pick up the idea that it is bad form to shine brighter than other people were shining. And maybe it wasn't just my family where I picked up the idea that a bushel basket can be a helpful tool to keep your light from being too shiny, too much, too bright, too Marci.

Thanks to therapy and the support of good people, I'm more comfortable now with the idea that my light is better on a lamp stand than it is under a bushel basket, but for most of my life, I've been much more comfortable with the earlier part of the sermon on the mount than I was with this idea of shining your light before others. *Blessed are those who mourn* feels like a more Christian thing to espouse than does telling people to shine their light before others, because our culture uses that phrase to be braggish and boastful.

But here's the thing.

People need light. We're like plants. We need water and light to grow. There's a lot of darkness out in the world right now, big shadows being cast from the spotlights of leaders with fragile egos, and those shadows are hurting and harming people. Food support, access to healthcare, a just immigration process, due process, and so many other things have gone away in less than a year, hurting people who need the support of a government rather than active harm from the government.

People need light. People need light to see hope.

People need God's light, but when Christian nationalism replaces the gospel, people can't see any light shining in God's name.

They see Christianity being used to justify the harming of immigrants and refugees, even though scripture is very clear that immigrants are to be welcomed.

They see Christianity being used to justify so much hatred and cruelty, even though Jesus in Matthew 25 was very clear that whatever we do to the least, and the last and the lost, we have done to Jesus himself.

They see people paying millions of dollars to sit at tables that Jesus would have flipped and overturned.

What if this congregation, in our city on a hill, could really live into the vision of giving light to the world? What if we got rid of our bushel baskets and put that light on lamp stands?

Because people are thirsty for a different message about God than the one they see on the news. *That's why we're here, right?* We're tired of being gaslit when people with power claim God is exclusive and mean and cruel. We're desperate for community that gives life and offers support. We're here because we know of a God of love, and justice, and compassion, and welcome, and mercy. We're here for both comfort and challenge, that we may find rest and welcome here so we can carry that light with us into the week.

The leaders of this congregation believe we are being called to put our lights onto lampstands so others in our community can see light in God's name. And when I think of this passage from Matthew's gospel, I see you.

'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.'

Give light to the world is both our giving campaign theme and also a foundational verse about who we are as a congregation.

We speak and live our values, so that others may also know God's love. As Jesus preached, the kingdom of God has come near and we are called to share that good news with the world.

We serve and enrich our community, because we follow the example of Jesus and we know that however we treat others is how we treat God. We also know that when our community is healthy and cared for, all of us are the beneficiaries. The world gets brighter when other people are safe to shine their lights too.

We gather in this beautiful space the earlier saints of Calvary left for us, so we can **experience awe and wonder** in music, in worship, in the silence after a prayer. The mundane moments of our lives can be suffused with God's holy light when we are on the lookout for the presence of wonder in the world. Worship is one of the moments in our week when we train our vision to see God's awe and wonder in the rest of our lives. Worship is where we refill the oil in our lamps, so our light can keep shining.

We seek to meet God, because we believe God is first seeking to meet us. We also recognize that God is bigger than we can fully comprehend, so we do not confuse our glimpses of God with a full understanding of God. But we worship the God who both created the enormity of the universe and put the stars on their courses in the heavens, and also chose to be born one of us, a vulnerable infant child, in need of care and protection. This is the God we seek. The more light we shine while doing the things God calls us to do, the easier it is to seek God.

We welcome people of all stages of faith—some of us have been in the pews, of this church or another, all of our lives, with a faith that has grown and adapted without much conflict. Others of us have experienced harm in the church, or couldn't reconcile what we knew of God's love with the hatred and exclusion we experienced, left religion to save our lives, and are coming back now because God's call never went away, and over time we were able to hear it again. Wherever we are in our journey of faith is welcome here. If your faith is a 60-watt bulb with a stable power supply, or if your faith is a candle flickering in the gusty winds of the world while you seek to shelter that flame, or if your faith is somewhere in the middle, each and all of those lights are welcome here.

Those are some of the lamp stands on which we put our light, so that God may be glorified, so we can radiate God's light to the world.

And we need you. When you invite people to join you—maybe for worship, maybe to volunteer, maybe to attend a concert or book event—when you invite people to join you, you radiate God's light to the world.

We're about to dedicate our pledges for the 2026 budget year. Your faithful generosity has provided for our ministry in the past. And if every person in this congregation were to make a pledge, of any amount, we'd meet our stewardship goal easily. Thank you to those of you who have already turned in your pledges for the coming year. Thank you to those of you who are prayerfully considering how you can participate. Your gifts and pledges are many more lights on lamp stands that help us radiate God's love to the world. Thank you for the many ways you shine Christ's light to the world already. It is such a gift to be your pastor, and in a world of such uncertainty and chaos, I'm so grateful for this congregation in a city on a hill. Keep on shining that light.

Amen.