

All Saints Sunday Sermon for November 1, 2026
Loosely Based on 1 John 3:1-3
For those preaching in the Western ND Synod
Provided by Pastor Mike Pretzer, Assistant to the Bishop

Today, All Saints Sunday, is a reflective day for many. This time of year is also a reflective time for me. My dad died in the month of August. My mom died in the month of October. And every year in the church, the first Sunday in November is a time to remember the saints, those who have died in the faith. For me, it is a time when I think about my own family members who have died as well as all of the funerals that I have conducted in my many years of being a pastor. In the fall when we are surrounded by the dying landscape, we have a heightened sense of the other deaths we have experienced. This is a good time to be reflective.

This time of reflection might be a time when grief is revisited. Grief has its purpose, its role to play in the ebb and flow of life. Grief is how we deal with loss, loss of any kind. But the grief that we know about the most is the grief we experience when someone we know or love dies.

I remember a time when I felt the physical reminder of the grief I was carrying. It was summer of 2016 after my family and I were returning home from a month long family vacation and continuing education trip. The trip was amazing and wonderful but at the end of the trip, between 3 and 5 miles south of our town, I felt a weight and a depression come over me. It was so drastic, so noticeable, so physical, I was shocked. The high from the trip was suddenly turned into a strange feeling of sadness, just before we drove back into town. I was struggling to figure out what was going on.

After some thought, I realized that 3 miles south of town, I drove past the home of a bachelor farmer who lived with his mother. He had an interest in all kinds of livestock,

especially birds. He incubated the eggs from the peacocks, guinea hens, chickens and emus that he raised. He enjoyed having my family and me out to see the birds or the donkeys or his garden, or the other projects he had going on. In fact, his cattle were my source of manure for my garden. I even preached a sermon one time titled "Bill's Manure." And Bill especially enjoyed playing a few hands of pinochle when I was out for a visit. Bill was a great guy. I enjoyed him so much.

But unfortunately, Bill had contracted an unexpected disease. It was called All Systems Atrophy. It was a disease which caused his whole body to shut down. It progressed similarly to Lou Gehrig's disease. Everything about him was affected, his muscles, his balance, his speech, his ability to swallow. It progressed slowly, but also way to fast. Bill handled it gracefully. He sold his livestock. He sold his birds. He stayed at home as long as he could. He gracefully moved into the nursing home. But in those last days before he died, all he could do, as he lie in his hospital bed, was cry. His funeral was one of the hardest funerals I've ever done. It had a strong affect on me.

So I realized, as we drove past the place where Bill lived and farmed when we returned home from our trip, that unconsciously, Bill's death and funeral and the grief I carried because of it, was coming back to me. I also realized it wasn't only Bill's death that I was remembering and the grief over his loss that I was feeling. It was all of the people whom I knew and loved who were no longer living. It was a dramatic realization: I had been carrying so much sadness, grief and loss within me. The physical weight of it came crashing back upon me as we drove closer to home.

I'm not the only one who carries within my bones the weight of grief. It is a burden we all share. We all know loss. We all know deep sadness. We all know grief. We all know the injustice of death and the emptiness that it leaves.

So we struggle through it. We bare its weight. We grieve. And somehow we survive. As people of faith, we believe that life goes on beyond this life that we know. Somehow we trust that God keeps everything held together, despite our sense that everything is falling apart. Our greatest hope as Christians is that Death does not have the final say. By the power of Christ's resurrection, we are all raised to eternal life, not eternal death.

Even though we have this eternal hope, I think of Bill when I hear these words from the hymn, *For All the Saints*, "For all the saints who from their labors rest, who thee by faith before the world confessed, thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest. Alleluia! Alleluia! (verse 1) Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine, we feebly struggle, they in glory shine; yet all are one in thee, for all are thine. Alleluia! Alleluia! (verse 3)

At this time of year, All Saints Sunday, we in the church gather to remember the saints who have died. We also try to comprehend how God holds all of this together, and how, with God's love, each one of us is a saint in the here and now. This time of year is a time to remember. (We took a moment to do so earlier in our service.) We remember all who have died, all who have touched our lives with their love and laughter, their presence and their joy.

In remembering God's care for those who have died, we focus on God's care for us, God's abiding love, God's delight in who we have been created to be, God's presence and peace. These are God's gifts that never leaves us.

Our scripture today reminds us: "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.....Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this; when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." (1 John 3:1-2)

We are children of God, even when we forget, even when we struggle, even when we feel like God is a million miles away. But God loves us no matter what. And God promises to

never leave us. As the famous poem, *Foot Prints in the Sand*, says, when we are at the lowest points in life, God does not leave us, but rather, it is at those times that God carries us.

We also believe that we are a saints right now. God is at work in you now. God is big enough and good enough to redeem your suffering and through it, work for the good of others, just as God worked through Christ's suffering to redeem the world.

And so, on this All Saints Sunday, we remember. We remember those whom we have loved and who now are dead and gone, yet who rest eternally in God's hands. We remember and give thanks to God for mysteriously keeping all things hanging in this eternal balance. This is why we can face the loss of our loved ones whom we remember on this day -- because we know that God loves each one of them and has brought them through the gateway of death to new and abundant life. In God's presence all the saints are triumphant.

So from here, we can go out into this week and into this world and face the challenges set before us. Knowing that God accompanies us into this week and into this world, God promises to use us to accomplish God's will. Despite the weight of grief that we still carry with us, we keep moving forward. "We feebly struggle, they in glory shine."

God has blessed the saints, those who have died. And God blesses the saints, you, who are still here. Today as you remember those whom you have loved and lost, may you also remember that our loved ones aren't truly lost. They reside in a place of God's glory. And somehow, mysteriously, they are still with us.

As you reflect at this time of year, may God especially grant to you the gift of God's peace. Amen.

Litany of Remembrance - All Saints Sunday

When we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might have a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

O God, we remember with thanksgiving those who have loved and served you on earth, who now rest from their labors. O God, our help in ages past and our hope for years to come, we give you thanks for our loved ones and for all who have followed the light of your word throughout the centuries into our time and place. God of grace and glory, we remember before you today those we have known and loved by saying their name, recalling their face and by lighting a candle:

(Name and light a candle for each person who has died in the last year. May also toll a bell or a chime.)

Conclusion:

Let us pray: O God, as we remember these people, strengthen us to follow Christ through this world until we are carried into the harvest of eternal life, where suffering and death will be no more. Comfort us in our grief, restore us to joy and hope. And now, hear our prayer in the name of the good and gracious shepherd, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.