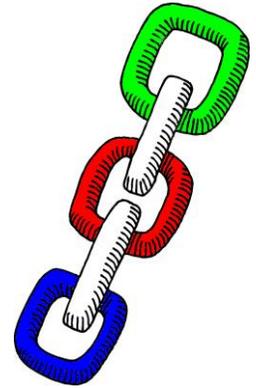


“For All The Saints,  
Especially The Ones You Haven’t Met Yet”  
All Saints Sunday, November 5, 2017  
Matthew 5:1-12

### CHILDREN’S MESSAGE

Once upon a time there was a ship, and the captain learned there was a big storm coming. They were far out to sea, so to stay safe during the storm the captain ordered the anchor to be dropped. So down goes the anchor to the bottom of the sea. And as the storm rages up above, the ship holds tight and everything is okay. But the red link on the chain started to complain, *“Hey! I’m bored down here. I can’t see anything. I don’t know where I am or really what I’m doing here. And then the red link said, “Now if I was that blue link, connected to the anchor, that would be something! Then I’d know I was important. Being number one, that would be cool. And if I was the green link, the one that attached to the boat up there, that might be even better. To be the final link in the chain, the one that connects everyone else to the ship. What an honor. But no, I have to be the one right in the middle of this murky water. I can’t see anything and worse, no one can see me. I think I’ll go looking for a better place on the chain.”* So the red link let go and disconnects from the rest of the links and takes off. And do you know what happened? The ship got pushed against the rocks somewhere on the coast and sank.



Even if that link of the chain is never seen, is it important? Yes. It is as important as the first or the last. It is like that with telling the story of Jesus. Lots of people would like to be the ones who knew Jesus when he was on earth. They would like to be the first links in the chain of knowing him. But we are a long way from the first links in the chain of telling the story of Jesus. And we don’t know how far to the end. So it can seem like we’re in the murky middle. But when you tell someone about Jesus, it is as important as when the first people told the second people about Jesus.

**PRAYER:** Holy God, God of every link, remind us today that every single link, from the first to the last is just as important as every other one. If one breaks, whether it be near the beginning or near the end, the result is the same. So Holy God, remind us that you have an unbreakable faith in us. And may your faith in us inspire our faith and our work as the chain’s most important link. Amen.

## SERMON

Do you remember where you were and what you were doing on July 15, 1983, about 3:00 in the afternoon? I do and I will never forget. I had just finished the very emotional funeral of a man from the church who died suddenly and way too young. I stepped into the office to take a call. It was from a close friend telling me of the birth of their first child, my Godson, just three weeks before the birth of my own son.

I never in my life have been more profoundly struck by the place I stood - right in the middle between death and life, between saying goodbye and then turning, in an instant, to say hello. Standing in a place where I could clearly look back and clearly look forward. And that spot, that holy ground, is where all of us stand while we continue to draw breath.

There is a temptation on All Saints Sunday only to look back, only to name the great ones who have gone to glory. Saint Paul. Saint Augustine. Saint Martin Luther. Saint Teresa of Calcutta. Later in this service we will also look back and remember those saints of Mount Cross who joined the Church Triumphant during the past year.

And on a day like this, each of us looks back to give thanks for the special saints in our own lives. Saint Mom. Saint Dad. Saint \_\_\_\_you fill in the blank\_\_\_\_.

When Lutherans talk about the saints, we know that we don't pray to them. But we pray with them in our minds and in our hearts, conscious and thankful of their example, praying that we might live faithfully as they did.

### **For all the saints, who from their labors rest...**

Today is also a day when I look back with thanks as I consider the time I have spent with you, the saints of Mount Cross. And not only you, but the saints in all of the churches in which I have grown in faith and sought to faithfully serve. From First English Lutheran Church in Los Angeles, where I was baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, to First Lutheran Church in Northridge where I grew up, to churches in Minnesota and Glendale. But I have spent 40% of my entire life with you and almost 70% of my life as a pastor with you. We have shared a lot and shaped each other's faith in lots of ways.

The next verse of the hymn we will sing speaks about us - the saints of today. But when we sing "*we feebly struggle...*" I want to say, "Yeah, there were some feeble struggles, but I'd say there were more moments of boldness and confidence and agreement and success along the way.

### **Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine...**

I've been known to write a few lines to someone else's tune. And if I was going to write some more lines to this great hymn, between singing about those who have gone before and how we'll someday join them, I'd pen a line or two about the saints you haven't met yet, and how you'll meet them and invite them and help to add them to the chain that connects us to the Alpha and the Omega, our beginning and our ending in Christ.

God loved the whole world so that he sent his Son, but not everyone knows yet how much they are loved.

When Jesus was lifted up, he drew all to himself, but not everyone has felt that attraction yet.

Little Isabella and little Magnus, they are blessed because someone brought them. Brought them to God's house and introduced them to God's people. They are blessed because they suddenly have more brothers and sisters than they will ever be able to comprehend. And you are blessed because their families made it easy for you to come to know these saints you didn't know before today.

But what about those saints who don't have a mom or a dad that will bring them to God's house to meet God's people and learn from their earliest moments of life what it means to live surrounded by a people powered by grace?

Once in awhile they may peek in the door. Please be ready when they do. Please notice when they do. And please appreciate how hard and even terrifying it may be for them to have taken that step to enter those doors.

But more often than not they will drive past, drive under the cross that stands tall over Camarillo and not give it a second thought - if they even gave it a first thought.

So the extra verses I'd add to "For All The Saints" would be lines that would inspire you, energize you, give you courage and confidence to go out and say something...

But not necessarily like Peter. More like Philip. Peter went out on the Day of Pentecost and in Acts 2 you can read what he said to those who needed to know they were part of the chain. But it took him about 600 words to make his point. Few of you are probably ready willing and eager to do that.

That's why I love Philip's approach. He went and found someone he knew - Nathanael. And he issued, not a 600 word proclamation but rather a mere three word invitation: "Come and see." <sup>John 1:46</sup>

Those can be some of the most powerful and life changing words someone will ever hear. As I look out on your faces, I see people who were here ahead of me. And I know some of you, like me, were born into this gang we call the Lutheran Church. But not all of you. Some of you are here because someone else said to you, "Come and see." And if there's anyone who fits that description who would wave a hand and give me an "Amen!" - I'd love for you to testify right now.

The hymn is called "For All The Saints," and the *all* won't be *all* until you invite...not just welcome but invite those who don't yet know they are part of a great chain.



There used to be about 400 of these on these premises. This is the last one. And it is here to help me remind you one last time, to stick your necks out. And to do it without fear, *for the Lord your God shall be with you wherever you go.* <sup>Joshua 1:9</sup>

You stuck your necks out 26 years ago when you called a 39 years young associate pastor to come and be your shepherd. And if this last sermon was about me, I would have listed some of the ways you've tested and stretched and grown and enriched my faith in Jesus, Lord of the Church, over these many years.

But today isn't about me. I'm just one of the saints. Today is about all the saints, all the rest of them, and especially the most important ones.

You and I - we know to Whom we belong, we know where we're going and we know the peace that passes all understanding that comes with knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. We're important, but not the most important.

The most important saints are the ones you haven't met yet, but who one day, thanks to your invitation, will become part of the countless host, singing praise to Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Alleluia!