



ST BART'S

A Sermon by
The Rev. Lynn C. Sanders, *Chief of Parish Ministries*

All Saints and All Souls

*Sermon preached at the eleven o'clock service, November 02, 2014
All Saints' Sunday — Based on 1 John 3:1-3 and Matthew 5:1-12*

Two weeks ago, I was in my hometown of Greenville, South Carolina, dancing at the wedding of my beautiful eldest niece and her handsome husband in stunning, picture-perfect October weather. The wedding and associated festivities were all lovely, elegant and great fun ... maybe especially so for me because I got to be there as a guest rather than being in charge of anything!

During the delightful whirlwind of the wedding weekend, I visited with extended family I'd not seen in many years. I observed how the cousins of all ages were growing up. I met many people for the first time and hope to see them again. I delighted in the company of a dear friend of over thirty years. I saw my brother and sister-in-law as proud, joyful parents of the bride. I beheld my nieces grown into beautiful, graceful young women. I saw my nephew and his wife - brand new parents - being a loving father and mother to their new son, my new great-nephew. I met my new great-nephew for the first time and got to hold him for a long time, which made me very, very happy. I was astonished to find that, at two months old, my great-nephew had already attended more Clemson home games than I have in my entire lifetime.

There is nothing like a wedding (or a funeral) to bring together families and friends from different parts of the country, from different walks of life, sometimes from what feels like different planets. All of us at that wedding, as at any wedding, gathered to celebrate the love and commitment of two people, to share in both the hope and promise of their new beginning and the continuation of something very ancient.

Just before traveling to South Carolina for that wedding, I officiated at two memorial services here at St. Bart's. For each of those memorial services, family and friends traveled from different parts of the country/world, different walks of life. We gathered here in this beautiful and holy space to grieve together, to shed tears together, to celebrate together the life of the person we loved, to remember and share what that person meant to us, and will continue to mean to us.

Think back over this past year of your own life. What new person/people has your circle of family and friends grown to include? What changes have you, your family, and friends weathered in this past year? Who has been an example for you? Who is not here with you this year?

Today we are celebrating both All Saints (November 1) and All Souls (November 2). We're observing All Saints at our four usual Sunday services. It's one of the most appropriate days of the year for Baptisms, which we'll have at the 9am and 11am services today. This year, because today is November 2, All Souls Day, we'll also have a brief, special All Souls service of prayers at 12:30 downstairs in the Memorial Chapel. All are welcome to come and pray particularly for those close to you.

In our Christian tradition, we trace our observance of All Saints as a day to commemorate all the saints, known and unknown, back to the late 4th and early 5th centuries. Our observance of All Souls can be traced to the early 11th century, when it was popularized by the Benedictine monastery of Cluny and all its daughter houses, as they increasingly concerned themselves with prayers and masses for the dead.*

Because I grew up in a tradition that did not celebrate either All Saints or All Souls, I still feel like I'm playing catch-up here. Some people have told me All Saints is for remembering the "famous" saints, like Patrick, Bridget, Cecelia,

Peter; All Souls is to remember the non-famous saints, like the ones in our own families. Other people have told me that All Saints is for remembering all Christians, living and dead, and that All Souls is a time to pray for the dead, particularly, but not exclusively, our own relatives.

This year, in yet another effort to get this sorted out for myself, I Googled All Saints. This year there is new information! You may be surprised, as I was, to find that the top Google result returned for All Saints was: AllSaints, “a British fashion retailer of women’s and men’s clothing, footwear & accessories.” There are three locations in Manhattan at which to celebrate, the closest right up the street at Bloomingdale’s.

Rather than get overly concerned about agreeing on what exactly is supposed to happen on All Saints and All Souls, I’d suggest that we look at the bigger picture. When we as Christians celebrate All Saints and All Souls, we are doing so in the fundamental belief that there is a spiritual bond and connection between those who have gone before us and are now somehow living close to God’s presence in another realm, and those of us still here on earth, also living close to God’s presence, here in this realm.

Those who have gone before us are not ghosts or goblins or spiritual forces we need to fear, or to trick or to appease. They are people with particular gifts and particular faults and foibles, beloved of God, redeemed by Jesus, with whom we are bound together in our baptism.

For those who have gone before us—and those of us still here—I take comfort in the Beatitudes, our reading from Matthew today. It comforts me to hear that all of us will face times of being poor (in material things and/or spirit). We’ll face times of mourning, times when we hunger and thirst, times when we need mercy and when we need to give mercy. Maybe times when we are persecuted. Those who’ve gone before us faced these things, too. How can we look to those who’ve gone before us—and those around us now—to teach us how to live faithfully as Christians?

“Blessed are you” ... Blessed: the closest meaning from the Greek is “happy”—not happy as in joyful, but happy as in “resting secure.” We can rest secure in all these situations.

That’s the power of celebrating All Saints and All Souls here in community together. We draw strength from each other, and from those who’ve gone before us, resting secure that we are God’s own, that God is with us.

Who are those who have entered the St. Bart’s community this year? There are many people, in various stages of entering—some attending for the first time today, some having been here for awhile, still deciding if this is the church home for them. (Note: we hope yes! But no pressure.)

Last Sunday about 30 people came forward to be welcomed officially as members of St. Bart’s. Today, people of all ages will be baptized here. At this service, Davis, Eden, Noel, Cyrus, Conrad, Marc, and Pearl will become our newest brothers and sister in Christ, “sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.” Here we are in community together: each of us a person with particular gifts and particular faults and foibles, each of us beloved of God, all of us bound together in God’s love.

What changes have we seen as a community this year? Who was carried here as a baby last year, and now is scampering up and down these aisles and chancel steps? Who has graduated? Who has lost a job or changed jobs? What relationships have begun or ended? In all the changes and chances of this life, who are the examples, living or dead, who have guided us?

And, most poignantly on this day, who is not with us this year? Just before our Eucharistic Prayer, we’ll read aloud the names of all those St. Bart’s members who have died and those whose funerals or memorial services have been held here since last All Saints’ Day. We know there are many more close to us—mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, friends—who have died since last All Saints’ Day. In the silence, offer their names up in prayer.

When we come together around this holy table any time, and especially today, somehow in our being together, in remembering, in sharing the wine and bread, we are bound together with all those who are gathering like this now all over the world, with all who have ever gathered like this for thousands of years past, and with all those yet to come who will gather like this in the years after we are gone.

This is the cloud of witnesses who surround us. This is the cloud of witnesses in which we take our place.

Beloved, we are God's children now. What we will be has not yet been revealed.

Beloved, rest secure: we are God's children now.

** I am indebted to Dr. Andrew Irving for this understanding of historical background and the "bigger picture," from our e-mail exchange in 2013.*

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