

NOVEMBER 2020 DEVOTIONS

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2020 - ALL SAINTS DAY

1 John 3:1-3 (NRSV)

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 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. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Because of God's gracious, unconditional love, all of us are *children of God*, joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Each of us are endowed with the blessings and benefits, privileges and powers implied by that relationship. On All Saints Day, as *children of God*, we stand together as a family of faith, not only with those with whom we currently share life, but also those who have died.

In the Christian church, All Saints' Day (a.k.a. All Hallows' Day, Halloween, or Feast of All Saints) is a day for commemorating all the saints of the church, both known and unknown, who have attained heaven. Today we remember and hold dear, those who shared their witness to faith, taught us to know and believe the good news of relationship with our Creator. We continue to hear their voices that not even death can prevent.

Each year during worship on All Saints Day, we light candles in honor of those saints we've encountered in our lives. This year will be different, since we will not be together in person. I encourage you to light candles in your homes and offer a prayer of thanks to God for those saints who surround you in this life, and in the next who have blessed your life.

Questions to Ponder

- Who are the saints that I've encountered in my life?
- How have their words and actions influenced by faith and relationship with God?
- What does it mean to be a child of God?

Prayer

We bless your holy name, O God,
for all your servants who, having finished their course,
now rest from their labors.

Give us grace to follow the example
of their steadfastness and faithfulness,
to your honor and glory;
through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.
(ENGLAND, 20TH CENT., ALT.)

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2020

1 THESSALONIANS 2:9-13 (NRSV)

You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

Paul offered the Gospel to the Thessalonians like a parent. In a spirit of gentleness, they were invited to receive the gift of God's gracious, unconditional love that never ends. Paul's use of familial metaphors helps to remind us that we are called to relate with one another as family - nurturing and encouraging, affirming and challenging, sharing our strength and vulnerability.

For some of us, it may seem against our nature to treat those we may consider to be strangers like they're part of our family. According to Paul our primary identity is not with one's culture or the nation where they live. It's our faith community, the community that guides and encourages living out of their relationship with God and others. Out of that community, we are called to reach out to others like Paul offering the invitation to God's gracious, unconditional love, and be welcomed to a faith community where they can spiritually grow as a child of God.

Last Sunday, All Saints Day reminded us of the need we have for mentors, and the relationship that reveals both mutual affection and authority. Take a few minutes to remember those who have mentored you along your faith journey.

Questions to Ponder

- Who are the mentors that continue to be present in my faith journey?

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we give thanks for those who were there when we began our spiritual journey, and all who continue the walk with us. Amen

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2020

Psalm 70 (NRSV)

*Be pleased, O God, to deliver me.
O Lord, make haste to help me!
Let those be put to shame and confusion
who seek my life.
Let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire to hurt me.
Let those who say, "Aha, Aha!"
turn back because of their shame.
Let all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you.
Let those who love your salvation
say evermore, "God is great!"
But I am poor and needy;
hasten to me, O God!
You are my help and my deliverer;
O Lord, do not delay!*

In just five verses, Psalm 70 expresses lament from someone who has been wronged, a cry for help and a need for deliverance from God. Read all together, it seems fragmented, scattered, disconnected. The text is filled with great emotion and passion, and a need for response to a situation that needs immediate attention. We live in a culture that often discourages speaking our grief and outrage. We are often encouraged to move on or let it go, but can we? Should we? Is it wrong to ask God to come to our assistance to help us to make things right?

This psalm is really a prayer of petition, making a request of God. If we're not careful, we may wrongly think these requests try to compel God to take vengeance on those or whatever has hurt us. Rather in lament, we admit our dependence on God to

help fight against injustice and oppression, or simply events everyday life and relationships that are troubling.

We too can lament. We can bring before God our pain and fears, our frustrations, misunderstandings and anger. It doesn't have to be provoked by a particular event, rather it can simply be a time to bear your deepest feelings, your very soul to God.

Questions to Ponder

- Are there matters and situations in my personal life or the greater that I need to bring to God?

Prayer

I turn to you Holy One, safe and secure in your presence. I plead with you to bring understanding for what troubles me, the injustice that may surround me. Amen.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2020

Matthew 25:14-30. (NRSV)

“For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, ‘Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.’ Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, ‘Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.’ But his master replied, ‘You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this

worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

What if the first two slaves had invested in their high risk ventures and lost everything? It's unlikely they would have been treated any differently, but this text isn't really wasn't about gaining money and accumulating wealth. It's about investing and a willingness to take risks in life. It's about living like Jesus, and how he hopes people will choose to live after he is gone. The most important risk is to avoid risk, not caring enough about something to invest in it (playing it safe, overly cautious, unwilling to give your heart away and risk losing everything).

Our faith may not seem to be a high personal risk. We often think of our faith in terms of personal safety - now and in the hereafter. We get our theology right, live a good life, avoid bad things. Yet did Jesus call his disciples to a life without risk? Are we called to live a life without risk? Think about how Jesus taught us to live, and as believers follow his way.

Questions to Ponder

- Does my faith journey reflect times of risk?

Prayer

I look to you O God to free me from what prevents me from making risky investments my faith journey. Amen.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2020

Isaiah 40:3 NRSV

A voice cries out:

*“In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”*

The first day of Advent marks the beginning of the Christian calendar. In church we begin with a Hanging of the Greens - filling our worship spaces with greenery that symbolizes everlasting life, lighting candles affirming the presence of the light of Christ, and hanging Christmons that direct our attention to the nature and work of Christ. We create a sacred space where our church community can begin our journey toward the celebration of Jesus' birth with God and with one another.

Today we begin our journey toward the birth of Jesus. Along our way we remember his humble beginnings - born in a manger, a barn, or a cave? We can imagine a newborn child asleep on a bed of hay, Joseph and his mother Mary watching over him. Here we begin to worship and adore *Emmanuel*, God is with us. Our traveling companions may be familiar, some unfamiliar. Joy and anticipation may lighten our journey. Sadness and dread may creep in at times as well, but always God will always be present leading us toward the promised kingdom.

Questions to Ponder

- How will you create a sacred space in your home to begin your journey toward the celebration of Jesus' birth?
- Name those who will be present on your journey.

Prayer

Most Divine, we give thanks for this season of Advent. Stay close as we journey toward the celebration of Jesus' birth. Pour into our hearts and minds your gifts of peace, hope, love and joy. Amen.

