

Give Thanks: For the Saints

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – November 3 2024

All Saints Sunday

Readings: Isaiah 25:6-9; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44 NRSVue

Reflection: Psalm 24

Greeting: Grace and peace to you from the one who is and was and is coming. Grace and peace from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn among the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. Amen. Glory and power to the one who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints forever. Amen.

(Revelation 1,22)

Prayer: Almighty God, we give thanks for your presence with us as we join together by your grace and mercy. We are thankful this day for the many saints that have gone before us into the place you prepare for each of us. We give thanks for your steadfast love and faithfulness that are with us all the days of our lives. We put our trust in your word and your ways, that you may lead us in the path of righteousness. May you watch over us, Heavenly Father, and protect us from harm. May your Holy Spirit guide us in gentleness. And may we always be reminded of the example set for us by your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. May we always give thanks that you are our God and we are your people. Let us worship this day in a spirit of truth as we grow by your wisdom and your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 24

¹ The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it, ² for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers. ³ Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? ⁴ Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false and do not swear deceitfully. ⁵ They will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from the God of their salvation. ⁶ Such is the company of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. ⁷ Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! ⁸ Who is the King of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. ⁹ Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in! ¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory. (Psalm 24 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 24, and we hear of God's glory. That the Lord has established the world. That we should praise God for the gift of salvation. How are you giving thanks this week? How can we remember those saints that have gone before us into God's house? Who can you lift up in your prayers this week? How can you show others that you are thankful that they are in your life? What can we do to celebrate the love of Christ as we give thanks?

Prayer: O God, our guide and our guardian. We are thankful that you hear us as we lift up our prayers before you. We know that you are with us day in and day out, and that you never leave us. We give thanks to you especially for the saints who have gone before us into your house. Help us to always be a people with hearts full of gratitude for the many blessings that we have in this life. We come before you this day with the joys that we have lifted up together. We turn to you with the troubles that we name together. But we also have celebrations and worries that we hold silently within our hearts. But you know our hearts Lord, and you hear the prayers that we share together on this day. May your steadfast love and faithfulness strengthen us in our mourning and our gladness. May we know that your presence is felt in our laughter and our tears. And may we always remember that you are there for us in all things. It is with grateful hearts that we remember your mercy and grace, demonstrated through the loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible Updated Edition. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 25, verse 6 through 9.

⁶On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. ⁷And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the covering that is spread over all nations; ⁸he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. ⁹It will be said on that day, "See, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."
(Isaiah 25:6-9 NRSVue*)

Our next reading is from Revelation chapter 21, verse 1 through 6a.

⁶On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. ⁷And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the covering that is spread over all nations; ⁸he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. ⁹It will be said on that day, "See, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation."

¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God; ⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” ⁶ Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. (Revelation 21:1-6a NRSVue)*

Our final reading is from John chapter 11, verse 32 through 44.

³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” (John 11:32-44 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

This This week we begin a four-week series on giving thanks. Today, we speak of being thankful for the saints. On All Saints, we reflect on life and those who have finished their journey in this life and gone on to the next. It gives us a time to think about our own journey and what we mean to each other, both in the here and now and with how we want to be remembered. There was a theme that linked out readings today together, and it is our tears. Because our own mourning is something that we think about when we consider All Saints. We have some repeated imagery in our readings. In Isaiah, God wipes away the tears of his people so they can rejoice in his salvation. That death is swallowed up forever and the God that the people have waited for is with them to wipe away all the tears from their faces. We hear that same kind of language in our reading from Revelation. In Revelation, it is that when all things are done and God makes his home among mortals, that crying in pain will be no more. God himself wipes away the tears from our eyes. While both of these have a message about the end of mourning, we also get an important message about mourning from our gospel reading.

Because in our gospel reading, it's not so much that tears are being wiped away, but that tears are being shed. There is debate about why Jesus weeps. And I'll share with you my own opinion. And you can do with that what you will. Jesus comes to see his friends and when

he gets to his friends, Mary comes and kneels at his feet. Some read this as an accusation. I do not. Because Mary says, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." And I don't think this is an accusation because I think it's a statement of faith. It's a statement of fact. She believes and knows. Had Jesus been there, Lazarus would not be dead. Nothing more. Christ is deeply moved, and he begins to weep. Now, me, I think it's because he sees Mary's faith and Mary's sorrow. It stirs in him his own feelings of loss. Because even if he is to call out to Lazarus to rise, he understands what's happened and how it has affected his friends. Their mourning becomes his mourning. Their tears become his tears. Because their loss is his loss. And that is the compassion that we find with our Savior. The same compassion that would wipe away every tear also means that when we weep, Jesus weeps with us.

What we learn from this account is that in the face of Christ, not even death holds power. And we know that to be true. But on this All Saints Sunday, I couldn't help but feel the lesson of his tears speaking to me louder than anything today. Because it's a reminder that mourning is natural. Mourning isn't a sign of weakness or unbelief. And I've heard people say that we have no reason to cry if we know the saints are in heaven. But I'm reminded that Jesus gives us permission to weep. Because we too can be deeply moved. Because our tears are not a sign that we don't believe. Our tears are a sign that even when we believe, loss still matters. But even amidst that loss, I am always thankful for those that have gone ahead. Because of the lessons that I have learned from them. Because I know that we are never truly separated in the love of Christ. And it gives me hope and it gives me comfort on days like this. When I think about all those who have gone ahead I'm reminded that we are never more than a prayer away. Because where we are, Christ is. And where Christ is, all the saints are. Those who have gone before, those who are here in this room now, and those who are yet to come are together in the love of Christ that goes beyond all ideas of time that we have. I take comfort in what we hear in our readings today. With Isaiah and Revelation, they both speak of comfort from our God. A God that cares how we feel. A God who loves us. A Savior who loves us to the point that he Himself would face death on our behalf. That he would die so that sin and death would hold power over us no more. To show that true power lies in compassion.

And so I am thankful. I am thankful for the time that I have had with the people that I have known in my life. I am thankful for the lessons that they have shared with me and for the memories I have made. Because they will be with me all the days of my life. I'm thankful for the people in this room right now. That we may take those memories, and we may grow with them. I am thankful that Christ is with us yesterday, today, and tomorrow. And I'm thankful for the reminder that no matter what life goes on. That while we are allowed to weep, we are not called to stand still. We are called to move forward with our memories. To move forward with the lives that we have. To honor those who have gone before. Because they would not want to see us hold still and never do anything again. They would want to see us go forth to live. To live a life in Christ that draws others to him. That they too may know of the hope that we share in life eternal in our risen Savior. That on this day we share in that hope. The hope of a Savior who weeps with us. The hope of a God who redeems us. Of a Holy Spirit that moves us. And a Heavenly Father that wipes away our tears and speaks comfort in our time of need. May we remember the saints that have gone before. And may we carry them in our hearts with all that

we do in this life. That we may pass that along to the saints of the next generation. That they may carry on when we too are called home to our Heavenly Father. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Give Thanks

This last series before Advent looks at the many things we have to give thanks for. Each week will explore how we give thanks to God for all the many ways we have been blessed, both expected and unexpected. We will be looking at why we are thankful for those who have gone before us, for the music that we sing, for our failures, and for children. How do you give thanks to the Lord?

11/3: For the Saints

11/10: For Music

11/17: For Failure

11/24: For Children

Neoga Grace UMC

752 Walnut

PO Box 610

Neoga, IL 62447

(217)895-2809

Worship 10:30am

Toledo UMC

Madison & Ohio St

PO Box 267

Toledo, IL 62468

Worship 8:15am

Etna UMC

2799 Etna Rd

Mattoon, IL 61938

Worship 9:30am

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