

Sermon Transcript

I John 3:1-3 and Matthew 5:1-12 | November 5, 2023 | All Saints Sunday | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

I was in the memory unit (hold up candle).

Many of the members gathered for the service were napping, but as soon as we started singing, everyone was awake.

Everyone was singing... loudly.

It was BEAUTIFUL. No matter how much the effects of dementia had weighed on the minds of those gathered, that light shone brightly through them. When we finished, one of the ladies who had perked up, said “we should sing it again.”

So we did. I invited her to join the Faith choir!

Music often has a deep dwelling within the brain. It can be recalled after years of lying dormant. It can bring us together across generations and upbringings. It unites us.

Music is one of my fondest memories of Taryn’s grandma Rainy, who I am lighting a candle for after worship in the chapel.

Grandma Rainey and Buddy are an important part of my story.

I was a canoe guide the summer after graduating college. Taryn was a camp counselor and I wanted to spend some time with her.

I asked her if we could hang out after my first canoe trip when I got off of trail?

She said she had plans.

Oh no. Bummer.

She said she was going to see her grandparents who live in Nashwauk up on the Iron Range. And, they were going to be at Iron World in Hibbing... for a polka festival.

If I wanted to have my first date with Taryn, I was gonna have to join her for polka dancing.

Obviously, I did... and the legend of Buddy and Rainy, who owned their place on the dance floor (Dancing), became part of our story (all four of us).

Visits to their home in the woods always involved music—singing and the violin. They always had fun and were filled with joy.

Buddy would disappear for long periods of time each morning to go off and pray. Grandma Rainy had a sign near the bathroom sink that said “wash your hands and say your prayers... cos Jesus and germs are everywhere.”

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Grandma Rainy would sing “I love you a bushel and a peck” and they had a flower pot that, when you walked past it, would break out with the swing dancing hit “In the Mood.”

Dementia also affected Grandma Rainy at the end, but the light of Christ always shone through her.

Each year, All Saints marks a passage of time. We collectively say farewell to those who’ve gone before us—and those in our church whose stories of faith impacted our church. It’s why the sermon on the mount is such an appropriate reading to hear—it lifts up our spirits and names our mourning or sadness by promising that ours is the kingdom of heaven.

The light of 20 Saints in our congregation now flickers in heaven with Christ, our Savior.

But beyond our church, many of us remember loved ones, too. Many of us have submitted pictures of saints that left this earth beyond this year—there is no time limit on how long we grieve and lift up their memory.

In our Brewed Theology time this morning, we’ll reflect on a quote from Anne Lamott’s book *Bird by Bird* in which she describes facing her friend Pammy’s impending death. Someone told Lamott, “watch Pammy carefully right now because she’s teaching you how to live.”

When we gather with each other at a funeral, we celebrate the promise of resurrection. We often do this by making the service personal—naming that our loved one is called by name, but that their faith story has provided a path for us to follow. I can see how God has been at work in and through the lives of those who have now continued that journey to heaven.

On All Saints, I like to share a few stories of the saints in our congregation who’ve died. I won’t share something about everyone—but we can learn a bit about how to live from those who showed us grace through their lives of faith.

At Faith, that began on All Saints Day one year ago, November 1st, 2022—from Jean Anderson, who actually wrote down her own stories and words of wisdom that were collected into a book.

One summed up her life like this:

Jean wrote “my biggest happiness is that I have love, life, and laughter along with faith. Every morning when I wake up, I thank God for another day and every night I thank God again for giving me that day.”

Or Steve Wells, who loved serving—especially Grandma’s Attic, which provides kids a teaching opportunity to share, and the stories he’d share at Old Guys about prison ministry.

Many of Steve’s stories began with the phrase, “wouldn’t it be fun...?” He’d open up the classifieds each week and scour over the miscellaneous items for sale.

Wouldn’t it be fun to get a Go Kart? It actually was a Golf Cart. He bought it anyway.

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Wouldn't it be fun to get a Ferris Wheel? The city told him no so that his loving, and VERY patient wife, Gail... didn't have to.

Jerry Robinson was a confirmation guide for many of our members. One of those students, Laurie, grew up and Jerry had inspired HER to be a guide. She told me that "Jerry was so happy and confident in his faith. He always set a great example."

There are the story-tellers whose funerals I missed while on sabbatical.

Bill Hoar ALSO wrote a book—but as he recounted with me during our final conversation, it was missing one thing. He'd written an adventure story for young adult readers through Peace Corps publishing. Everything was done except it needed a cover. If only he could find an artist who could bring his story to life and finish the book.

Someone like... Becky Wosick, a phenomenal artist at Faith who has illustrated children's books. Becky, gracefully, connected with Bill and came up with this:

Robby and the Pirate Mouse (Cover) Which will be published soon!

Delores Weeda, after hearing a few sermons out of me about camping and canoeing, shared HER adventures and stories back in the day that she'd compiled in a book. It was her way for those memories and stories to live on.

Will Much made music his whole life. If you've ever played in a band at Faith Lutheran, Will has played with you. His service was a musical tribute to him—many musicians arrived to pay their respects to him by lifting up their songs of praise to God.

Faith Ek told stories through her photography—often pictures of the heavens that she took through extensive planning ahead with Jeff to capture those moments. Many times, those snapshots of God's beautiful creation were right out her window (SLIDE). Like this one she took in May of a young bird being fed in the nest.

As her loved ones gathered to say farewell, her photos were given away so that this keepsake, those memories of moments seen through HER eyes were shared with them.

Faith also loved the Wizard of Oz... could quote the entire thing. So, Deacon Nina naturally wore Ruby Red Slippers to her funeral and upon recognizing that Faith's new dwelling is with our Father in Heaven, reminded those gathered that for Faith, NINA: there's no place like home.

The advice to Anne Lamott was right. The saint can and DO teach us how to live. That's clearly what Jesus was doing at the Sermon on the Mount.

Yes, many of those gathered were downtrodden. Sad. Oppressed. Nobody around him would identify as being particularly blessed. Set apart. Clearly living the good life.

Yet it's those around him that he calls blessed. Until the "those" who are blessed turns to "you". You are blessed when you are persecuted, reviled, and lied about.



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As one of my pastor friends asks,

Will we believe those promises for ourselves or not? Will we believe that God will make all things right for us? If so, we can rejoice and be glad, knowing we have a great reward in heaven.

You... yes you, Lloyd. Larry. Jean. Jennifer. Lynn. Lilly.

You are blessed. Your life matters. Your faith story, as it's being written, is making a difference in the lives of others. Don't forget how big of an impact your faith has on those whom you meet. Someday, heaven awaits. In the meantime, live well for God today. Amen.