All Saints Day
Saint Dunstans' Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas
1 November 2026

John 14:1-6

I have a modern-day parable taken from The Lamplighter Magazine, (as quoted by Brian Stoffregen at Crossmarks:) "Behold, a ball team went forth to play a game of baseball. Just as the umpire was saying 'batter up,' the catcher for the home team arrived and took his place. The center fielder didn't show up at all but later sent his regrets. The third baseman likewise failed to come to the game, having been up late the night before. The shortstop was present but left his glove at home. Two of the substitute fielders were away on a little weekend trip but were there in spirit. Verily, when the pitcher went to the mound he looked around for his teammates, and lo, his heart was heavy, for their places were empty. But the game was announced and the visitors were in the stands and there was nothing to do but to pitch the ball and hope for the best. But he had to serve as pitcher, first baseman, third baseman, and cover short and center field. When the absent members of the defeated team heard that their team had lost, a decision was made to get a new pitcher!" I will connect this parable to our sermon a bit later. For now, let us talk about the saints we have lost over the last few years.

When I read obituaries, I often become amazed at the fact that a person's entire life can be summarized in two, three, or even five paragraphs. In fact, many of us think we know others because we know their birthdays, we have seen them in church, or we can recognize their faces in a crowd. We create images of people that are mostly superficial, but we really know very little of most people we meet. When I do funerals, I often close my eyes and try to imagine the rest of the story.

In my mind's eye I see the joy and the hurt, the certainty and the doubt, the laughter and the tears, the hope and the despair, the love and the regrets, the choices taken and the choices denied, births and deaths, sleepless nights and afternoon naps, prayer and miracles. In short, I see life. Life is more than the highlights of our birth, school, graduation, wedding, children, and death of parents. Life is filled with yesterdays in search of tomorrows. Life is the now that acts as the stage of the drama of our lives. And let me assure you that every life that ever lived is a story painted by God on the canvas of time.

A life is the total sum of millions of small choices, actions, commitments, relationships, and experiences of joy and pain. But life is greater than these choices, actions, commitments, relationships and experiences. Life is also about our internal dialogue with ourselves and with God. Life is filled with

unspoken moments. Unspoken hopes and dreams, unspoken fears, unspoken regrets, unspoken gratitude, unspoken love, and unspoken prayers only God can hear and answer. Life is drama and passion, joy and sorrow, mystery and exploration, self-reliance and hope that reaches beyond us. Life is this here and now of existence, and the "there beyond today" of God's promised eternal life.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the lives those who came before us and are now in God's own presence. Like us, many of them believed that death is not the end of the story. For those who believe in Christ there is promise that transcends our life. A promise of a future with God in a place where there are no more tears, no regrets, no illnesses, no brokenness, and no sadness. This is a reality most of us desire for ourselves, as well as for our families, children, grandchildren and friends. The promise of this future reality brings great hope to many of us, for it tells us that our lives are ultimately in God's hands. We are not alone and we have nothing to fear. Our Lord is our shepherd who will provide for us when our own time comes to join those we have lost along the way.

The passage from Matthew today is the famous sermon of the beatitudes, or the nine "blessed are you" statements of Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount. Throughout the history of the Church, the saints who have died in the Lord are often called "blessed" or "holy." They are blessed because their wanderings on this earth are done. They are no longer the victims of the sins of others, no longer ravaged by illness and fear, no longer overwhelmed with the cares of this world, no longer dealing with the consequences of their brokenness and failures. They are free from everything that held them captive to their vices and poor decision making. They are finally resting, waiting to be restored to the original design. Their suffering is finally over and God has wiped all tears from their eyes.

But today is not only for the blessed departed, but also for us. We need the hope that this day brings us. Those who believe that there will be a place for them in God's new creation know they are deeply loved by God. The people we remember today knew this, and most of us still believe this. It is normal for many of us to feel deep sadness today. After all, over the last few years we have lost many of the great matriarchs and patriarchs of this community, and many of us have lost dear family members and friends. But we grieve not like those who have no faith, but rather like those who have a profound hope that one day, in the new creation of God, we will be reunited with those we love.

I believe that if many of these beloved ones we have lost had a chance to give us a word of advice they would say, "Honor the commitments you make in your life, even when times get tough. Love your family and friends as they are,

knowing in advance that only God can change them. Serve humanity to the best of your abilities by becoming involved in your own community. Believe in something greater than yourself, even if at times God seems far away from you." Perhaps most importantly, these great saints would remind us that nothing is as important has having a proper relationship with God and with others.

These saints would also remind us that we too are saints. This is another application of this great Greek word for saints. The title applies to all of those who have been separated for the service of God, and we all have been separated through Baptism that we may be God's presence in the world. For Paul, all believers are called "Saints." What this means is that All Saints Day includes all of us. We are part of the baseball team the modern-day parable at the beginning of this sermon was talking about. By virtue of our baptism, each one of us became a fundamental player in this team. God expects us in the field of battle, doing our job to establish God's kingdom. We cannot stay home and leave kingdom building to the professionals, to those who wear robes. This is everybody's job. Changing the pitcher every few years is not going to grow your church, especially when we lack center fielders, third basemen, and shortstops. It is our Christian duty to show up and to do our part to build God's kingdom today.

As we remember those who have gone before us, let us do a status check and let us diagnose the health of our relationships and the health of our commitment to advance God's kingdom. We must ask two questions, "If I were to die today, would I leave any unresolved issues?" The second question is, "What have I done with the gifts God has given me?" And, when you do this assessment, do not forget to assess your relationship with God as well. If God has moved to the category of "Distant acquaintance," I invite you today to return, as God very much wants to move to the category of "Closest Friend." God loves you and wants to have a relationship with you. God depends on you for the advancement of the Kingdom. I pray the faith of the saints we remember today will inspire us to seek God out, to welcome Christ into your life, and to take your places in the field of battle, so that together we may build God's Church for the sake of the world.

May our Lord, Jesus Christ, continue to bless you today and always. Amen!