

Calvary United Methodist Church
November 3, 2019

SAINTS PREPARING OUR WAY
ALL SAINTS SUNDAY
Rev. R. Jeffrey Fisher

Children's Message:

Ephesians 1:15-16

I invite our children to come forth at this time. If the children would like to come up, please, up on the stage. Tend to watch the screen up here. It's a little clearer than the ones in the back.

I welcome you here today. You are all so rested today. Ah! A big spider! (It's fake.) It's fake, well thank you because I don't like big spiders that big. It's good to have you all here. Everybody rested from an extra hour of sleep? Everybody rested from the extra hour of sleep? Well...

I want to tell you about remembering and giving thanks today. Today is the day when we celebrate, we light these candles in the names of some people who have been very special in our lives. They are loved ones who have passed on. And sometimes when we remember we get sad but sometimes we can laugh and we remember so many wonderful ways in which the people we have loved have touched our lives.

The scripture today reminds us that there are a lot of things to remember and to give thanks for: for this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Do you know I give thanks for you because it would be pretty boring up here without you? I am happy when I see you every Sunday. It is so nice. And some of you have grown right on out of children's time because you are getting so tall and older and soon you won't be up here anymore, but I'm glad you are here and I'm glad all of these folks are here today because sometimes it is just nice to know that we are going to see each other.

How many of you have ever heard advertisements about what is coming soon. Do you have things like your birthday is coming soon, other things come soon? Do you get excited when you know something is upcoming? Do you get excited?

I had a problem when I was young. I would get so excited my parents would tell me, "Settle down. You are all wound up." Did any of you ever hear that? These children never wound a clock, I don't know that they know what it means to get wound up. But in the olden days if you would wind a clock too tight it would either pop or something and it wouldn't work any longer and their idea was, "Jeff, Jeff, don't get so excited. Go take a nap. Go rest a little bit. It's not quite time." Some of you probably know some upcoming movies over the winter. You have seen some, you can't wait to see them.

Sometimes in the summer, do you ever remember when it is cold all spring and finally your parents say we are going to go swimming this weekend and you get excited about it for the first swim. Especially if you are going to see some tunnels, right? You get excited about it. You can't wait.

Sometime I would get so excited I could hardly sleep all night. Have you ever been that excited? All night long all you can think about is tomorrow. Like if you are going to go to Disney over the holidays, did you ever get that excited?

Or perhaps, I always got excited when my dad said we are going to go camping or go fishing or go to the mountains or go hiking.

There are a couple of holidays coming up. Do any of you get excited about this? We get to be with our family and friends and my favorite turkey, right? And what's after Thanksgiving? Christmas...do you get excited about that? (Yes!) Why do you get excited about that? I saw yesterday in my mail there was a list of the top toys for this coming Christmas. Do you get excited about that? (Yes!) Yes, we get excited.

How about some of you have known that you had younger brothers and sisters coming. Did you get excited when you knew a new baby was coming to your house? Well....sometimes. We are going to go on that.

All of those things to me remind me that I have a lot to give thanks for because God is good all the time. Jesus, when he walked around, he also got pretty excited about the coming events and the people who worked with him, the men and the women, early on it was just the disciples who were all men at that time, they got excited because they didn't know what was going to happen. He was healing people. He was feeding thousands of people. People would hear about it and say, "We are so excited. We are giving thanks that this man is coming." That's what it's like when you come here. People are excited. And when your friends come to see you they are probably so excited because, "I get to see you." Do you get excited to see your friends? Not that spider! Our friends get excited and so it is in our life.

There are lots of people...I used to get excited if I was away in school and I would come home to go see my parents and grandparents and people I missed in my little town. And all the days of my life I am thrilled when I get to see people I haven't seen for a long time because probably some of you, your grandparents live a long way from you, so when you are together we create what we call our memories. We laugh and we play and we eat together and we do things together and those things are gifts from God.

When we read that scripture: I thank God for the ways I remember you. Because sometimes as we celebrate here today, it's difficult to use the word celebrate sometimes because we miss people and our hearts get broken. And when our hearts are broken we feel sad inside and

God says to this: You don't know it right now, but God says "I want to surround you with love."

God always wants us to know that even when we are having a bad day, God wants you to try to figure the good things and the good things for me, and I hope for you, are memories. Maybe your parents will help you to remember today memories today of people who are important. They might be living yet. Memories of things you do with your parents and your friends and your family and your grandparents. Memories keep people alive because there are sometimes when we tell stories and even when they are not in our house, you can still laugh at the things we do, right? Do you ever do that? You tell stories about friends and they are not even there?

So, we give thanks to the Lord Almighty God. He wants us to learn to give thanks in all seasons. Right now we are in the season of fall or autumn, right and it is so beautiful and the leaves are starting to fall down. What comes next? Now look at the trees here and look at the trees there. How are they different? They don't have leaves (They are covered in snow.) They are covered with snow. Don't want to go there, right? And you know what? Fruit trees have to take a nap, you know that? Fruit trees like we have will not grow in many parts of the world and if they did they wouldn't produce because they have to take a nap. They rest and remain dormant for the winter so in the spring, what happens? They get new blossoms and they produce whatever kind of fruit they have on them.

It's that way sometimes in our lives. We have these season from when we are born until when we pass away and in all those seasons God reminds us we are his and he will look over us.

What happens in the spring? Do any of you garden or help your grandparents or family garden? What happens in the spring when you plant those seeds? It grows! And what happens when it grows? It produces something probably, whether it is squash or potatoes or carrots or broccoli and it is kind of nice to see new life come down. And what happens in spring is all those things that appear dead comes back to life.

We don't quite understand all the Kingdom of God. It is beyond our earthly understanding, but He tells us that even when we leave here, one day we are going to come to life again in a new Kingdom called Heaven. And so what we do here at church is talk about faith. We believe things even though we haven't always seen it. But the people in the scriptures that we read today said we remember and we give thanks for the memories.

So, today, as you are with family and friends here, I hope you will give thanks for those people who are so important to you and that you remember.

Thank you for coming up today and God bless your week.

Old Testament Lesson:

Our Old Testament lesson today comes from Daniel. You might remember Daniel. He was in a furnace one time. You might remember Daniel. He was cornered by some lions one time. You might remember Daniel as one who interpreted dreams and was called in before King Belshazzar to interpret his dreams. It's a story today to remind us of eternal life; a story to remind us of all the other kingdoms there are in this world, they will all one day crumble. We see a lot of it in our own lifetime, but there is only one Kingdom that will remain eternal: the Kingdom of Almighty God.

(Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18)

Message:

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18

Saints. The men and women, children and youth who have helped shape us, mold us into the people that we are today. I remember hearing the story of the young lad asking his parent about looking at these stained glass windows and being told that was a saint. And he says, "Just what is a saint?" Well, as we look through our own stained glass window, he said, "A saint is one for whom the light of God shines through." I look out and I see beautiful saints, the Light of God shining through you. It has shone through others who have been a part of making you who you are this very day. In all honesty, some days my life's a little cloudy, but God tries to shine through us even in those days. And there are a lot of days I get up and I'm rip-rooting and saying "Life is so good." And then you get those cloudy days, you get those days of loss and torment and harm and hurt and pain and suffering and you say life is not so good in those days.

But the older we get the more we realize life just isn't always on the top or always on the bottom. If we choose to see life and understand the winds of change that come through our lives, we know that the God who is with us on the mountaintop is indeed that Gospel song we sing sometimes, the God also in the valley. For God is with us and we learn that life is really a journey and on that journey, just as any road you've ever taken, there will be quite a few bumps. But we cling to God. We cling to one another. We cling to our faith. We cling to the promises that say: This ain't all there is. There is a Kingdom of Heaven unlike any other kingdom.

And so it is that we look and we count our blessings. The more we count our blessings, the more the disappearing of heartaches and pains and sufferings of our past. Our blessings are many, are many.

I've shared before, I call weekly to a couple of my friends in Sierra Leone, West Africa. I know how they live. Small, small houses, some of them with dirt floors and grass roofs. Some of them have lost multiple children and multiple family members. They hope to live till 45 or 50. How is it going? Well, by the grace of God, we are surviving. Praise God! Can we say that? Can we be thankful and count the blessings for what we do have?

I love when I think about the Easter morning and the people going to the tomb and knowing about the resurrection. About two decades ago Larnell Harris and Sandi Patty sang a song called "I've Just Seen Jesus and I'll Never Be the Same Again." And I've loved to sing that song because since I was a little boy and I met Jesus, my life is never the same, never the same. But you know what? My life is not the same either because I've met you. You. And men and women and children are youth who have touched my heart by being a reflection of God's love and showing me what it is to love and to care and to be a part of a family called Christians and to try to live out our faith in community. We are indeed the living saints and those who are gone are the saints of God who are the cloud of witnesses in the Kingdom of Heaven.

And so it is that we find strength. When those disciples walked with Jesus, they were walking with someone who was telling them of what would come. They knew the Roman authority was destroying their world. They knew they were being oppressed by the wealthy. They knew they were being oppressed by those who controlled the politics of the time. Some things don't seem to have changed a whole lot. And yet they stuck with Jesus. You know why? Because this man who had very little, who came from a common existence, went around and he was feeding people who were hungry and giving them food and not just physical food for four or five thousand people. He was telling them of a better way, to look differently than just the things of this brief world, brief world. He was telling them about a gift of forgiveness and if you haven't found it, today would be your chance. I don't know where you are with Jesus, but one of the greatest gifts God has given me is the knowledge that no matter how dark and cloudy my life has been by me errors, my thoughts, my deeds, God says: Jeff, today is another new day. I'm the God of second chances. I'm the God of new beginnings. I'm the God of hope. I'm the God of healing. I'm the God who lives to break down all the barriers.

So, if you are broken and downhearted and sorrowful, God says: Let me heal you. Let me be a part of your life.

And so it was for Jesus when he met people, he knew what it was like to grieve. Do you remember the story of his dear friend Lazarus? Scripture says he cried. He cried. We cry. I cry for some of my loved ones who have been gone for years and some who have been gone in closer time because we miss. It's okay to cry, it's okay to be sad, but those who have loved us would want us also to find new life. Those who love us want us to find healing. They want us to find new hope. They want us to find peace of all things because you can imagine your own life. You would not want your children and your friends to stop believing in a bright new day, to stop living, to stop laughing, to stop enjoying life just because you are gone. They know the heartache because they too have seen it. But those who have loved us want us to find new life.

Today's message is a reminder to us that God's healing and peace is here if you want it.

We've got to seek him. We've got to choose him. We've got to say: Thank you, God, for the memories. It's hard to let go, but, Lord, I want to be free. I want to remember. I want to be thankful, but help me find new life.

No, we will never forget nor should we forget those we love, and, no, we will never be the same again, but a new me is okay, you know that? It is okay to be a new me, to find new people to share life with. To find new ways to find love and joy and peace. It's just okay even though we say everything that my family and my friends and my lovers were is gone, God says: But everything I have is before you, too. God opens doors to new life.

I've told you many times in these last three or four months that you are a gift. I believe it with my whole heart. We are coming to life because you are using your gifts, because we're sharing our love and our passion for God with other people. You are a gift and the people who touched your life who are gone were gifts from God. And sometimes when our gifts are no longer present with us, we still have the cherished memories of what we can do with all that we receive.

Sometimes we want to make life too easy and people say things sometimes terrible in our grief, say things: Well, it's time now for you to move on. I'm not going to tell you that because our time to move on is our appointed time between God and us. But I will tell you this: When we seek God, we will realize that this isn't Little Booboo and we won't replace and forget, but we will realize God has something new, a new beginning. We just sang that song: There is a day of new beginnings... And our loved ones are probably smiling from Heaven, saying: Oh, I want that for you. I want you to find new life. I want you to find new hope. I want you to find new beginnings. I want you to find new purpose.

The memories of those we have create in us the ability to do great things and God says: I will be with you. I am the Lord who heals you if you allow me. But we've got to be able to release, we've got to be able to let go when our time.

I am a man who every winter, I've had lung issues since I was a kid. I get colds and flu bugs and all that stuff that goes on and the worst for me is when I have the sore throat, you know, it's like I don't want to swallow it hurts so bad. You know that. And you take your medicine and you take the Z-pack, whatever it is and all of a sudden one day you think: I don't have any pain. It's gone. And you get those paper cuts and you hurt yourself and it hurts so and all of a sudden you wonder, you look down and it's...I can't see any of those cuts. Can you? They are gone, because healing will come when we least expect it. If we will pray to God and we will seek God then we will release.

Releasing...sometimes we want to hold on so bad, we hold on to a lot of things in our life that aren't healthy and those who love us, they want free as well. Trust me in God's care. And when we release those we love to God, something else can happen, then we can receive. We can receive new life, new hope, new possibilities, new beginnings.

Those who have departed from us aren't gone from us. When I go to a hike, I can hear exactly what my father would tell me. When I go to do other things around the church, I can think of pastors who instructed me and who are no longer hear. I can hear their voices. Not audibly, but you know that, don't you? You sit at Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner and you remember the stories from great-great-grandparents and you've heard the story fifty times and they are not there and guess what you do...I bet you end the story, don't you? You can fill in the blanks because we keep those stories, we keep our family, we keep our friends, we keep our saints alive by being and doing the very things we do, because we trust all of those. At every service I conduct: as much as you have given this loved one to us on this earthly journey, we return them to your care until one day, one day, we're together again, a place for the lamb and the lion, a place with no more crying, no more war, no more pain, no more sorrow, no more grief, a place of peace. Oh, boy, that will be wonderful!

And God says you can have that today, on this earthly journey. We'll have flashbacks. We'll have tears. We'll have sorrow. We'll have grief. We will go through the seasons, we do go through the seasons, but God said: I'm there with you all the time.

The winds and the waves, in the quiet and the silence in the thrills and the excitement, God is with us all the way.

God uses our weaknesses. Sometimes when I look at the things I do I'm thinking: God. He's saying: Oh, Jeff, please, pull it together. Do you ever get those ideas and you think God is on overdrive? Do you ever think of Moses? Do you think he was perfect? He wasn't. Remember Cain and Able? One brother killed another. You remember David, the little boy who slayed Goliath? Remember when he had an adulterous affair? Wanted her so bad that he called her husband home and then sent him out to battle to die? Do you remember Rahab, the prostitute who was an ancestor of Jesus himself? You see, God doesn't look for the perfect. We're all broken.

Steve shared a story he saw this week about a broken pack of crayons. You can still color with them, can't you? You can make great things. We are broken, but God says: You are a gift. You are my children. I love you and you can do great things.

God's redeeming love is that that transforms us. He wants to bring joy into our hearts if we let it. See, Daniel was called into King and that King says: Man, I'm worried, I don't know how to interpret this dream. But he says: I know you have heard dreams in with those lions and in that fiery furnace and Daniel says: I'm going to tell you about this dream. The dream is about the rise and fall of kingdoms and your kingdom is going to fall, but I'll tell you one: His kingdom will never end. The Kingdom of God. And why? Because for several thousand years there have been saints that we have loved who have kept that Word going. And to these saints today and to saints who are sitting here today, I say Thank You! Let us always praise God. Let us be thankful and let us live on, let us know that we can live on.

I have a list of saints. They are not all my family. They are my acquaintances, they are the friends, they are some people I've met one time in my life in a bus station or in an air terminal or on an island somewhere, but they've talked to me and they have shared that light, that glimpse of God in their life. You are that glimpse of God for some people and this list can grow through the years.

The saints who transform our lives, for the God on the mountain is the God of the storm and He wants to remind us today, in Revelation 14: Meanwhile the saints stand passionately patient, keeping God's commands, staying faithful to Jesus.

That's us. Let us remain passionate, let us remain patient until God's coming again, for God is with us. And this Word again from Hebrews: Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and sin which doth so easily beset us. And let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, for what? The joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

You see, we are called to embrace God, to trust God, not only with our lives, but with those who have gone before. God has a purpose for you today. God has a purpose for all of us today and He says we must live on until one day we are with those saints who have gone before us.

Thanks be to God for those whose lives we will celebrate. Praise be to God for how they have touched our lives and instructed us and shown us on the path to new life. I invite you to turn in your program to follow along for the Celebration of the Saints of Calvary.

Celebrating the Saints of Calvary
A Litany of Thanksgiving for Faithful Servants

One: We give you thanks, O God, for the saints who worshiped you and shared the faith in the church called Calvary. Throughout the course of their lives, their witness and work brought joy to us and glory to you. Their memories still inspire us.

ALL: We celebrate those who have finished the course in faith, and who now rest from their labors.

One: We give you thanks, O God, that the grief of their passing has yielded to the comfort of your promise. The peace they enjoy is the prize obtained for them by Christ. The home in which they reside is not made with hands, but eternal in the heavens.

ALL: We rejoice in the words of welcome that greeted them in victory: "Well done, good and faithful servants."

One: We give you thanks, O God, that they live and reign with you; a great cloud of witnesses that surrounds us with blessings. May we prove worthy of their trust in us as we continue on in the great race of discipleship. Draw us together with cords of love, that we may

cherish one another in the same Spirit that brought them close to us.

ALL: Restore us in hope as you have received them in grace. May we run and not be weary. May our hearts be filled with song.

One: We give thanks for these saints whose lives bear witness to the great things God has done. We celebrate their place in eternity with Christ:

**Anna & Ron Biller
S. Arlene Burkhart
James Evans
Leroy Fisher
Edward Funk
Elsie Graham
Betty Harry
Charlotte Hoover**

**Roger Krebs
June Kufner
Isabella Kurtz
Charlotte Gabriella Lehn
Janet McKissick
Betty Miller
Ken Miller
Jean Parks**

**Merrill "Skip" Perry
Jane Pietsch
Homer Pontius
Paul Powley
Joyce Roebuck
Russell Shrauder
Lorraine Snyder
Donald Stoner**

One: The light of the saints burns in eternity. Let us pray that we may be illuminated by their memory and witness.

ALL: Almighty God, you call your faithful servants together in every generation. We are one in communion. We are one in fellowship. Grant us grace to follow those who have gone on before us. May their words and deeds grant us guidance. May their faithfulness grant us courage. May their place in your eternal dwelling grant us peace. We rejoice in the life you gave them. We celebrate the eternal life they now enjoy, through their discipleship of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.