

All Saints Day 2022

2 Timothy 1:2-10

November 6, 2022

North Decatur Presbyterian Church

Rev. David Lewicki, preaching

There's lots of texts about saints in the scriptures—the epistle writers constantly refer to members of those early churches as “saints.” But my favorite text about saints *by far*—and the one that gets closest to the heart of All Saints Day is this letter that we know as 2 Timothy. It is one of the more intimate correspondences in the Holy Book. Paul is writing to his friend and traveling companion, Timothy. As happened often, they are separated. Paul is very possibly in jail—which happened to him a lot. Timothy is struggling. Paul's letter is one of encouragement.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Parent and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. ⁴Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. ⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. ⁶For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands, ⁷for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

⁸Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, in the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace, and this grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, ¹¹who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

Every year, we begin worship on All Saints with this old poem from John Donne that reminds us that every part of our lives and especially our deaths matter here in the church. Then we read our names. 6 names this year. Every year, my heart gets full with all the feelings as we walk in and remember these beloveds. Each one is gone from our presence, but at the same time they are present with us as part of the great communion of saints.

I happened to look back this week on all of the memorial services we've hosted since Beth and I began in 2010. I counted 44. Seeing each of their names filled me the same feeling of both grief and also gratitude.

All of us know the grief of losing someone whom we love. When they die, the place they leave inside us stays empty. Nothing fills it. Nothing replaces the one we loved. Every time we look inside of ourselves and draw close to that emptiness, the grief comes back. We miss our beloveds. And that grief is *good*. It means that we loved and were loved back by them.

The act of grieving can also bring a strange and wonderful warmth, a warmth that comes in our remembering. It is good to be engaged in the act of re-remembering. To remember our beloveds is to honor them. It's a way of saying to our beloved, “you shaped me, you made me the person

I am.” To remember someone after they’ve gone is to say I’m so glad and grateful you were part of my life.

Today we engage in the good and holy act of *remembering*. We set aside this day in the church to remember the people who made us, especially those who made us in love.

This remembering seems particularly important when we are feeling discouraged. Paul senses his friend Timothy is discouraged. So Paul begins, “Timothy, my beloved child... I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.” It’s so important for us to be remembered—not just after we’ve gone, but while we’re alive. Paul says, “I long to see you so I can be filled with joy.” Did you notice what Paul says next?

“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure Timothy, lives in you.”

What a tender remembrance? Paul points Timothy to his own family tree—people Paul seems to know well. Lois, Timothy’s grandmother. Eunice, his mother. When he wants to encourage Timothy in this moment when everything seems too much, Paul gets Timothy to remember. Remember Eunice, your mother. Her hands, her dignity, her forgiveness, her faith. Remember Lois, her voice, her courage, her love for you, her faith.

It’s as though the simple act of remembering ancestors—remembering those whose shoulders we stand on—remembering exactly how their love made us—is enough to keep us going.

The writer Annie Dillard has a wonderful line. She says, “I would like to learn, or remember, how to live.” I would like to *remember* how to live. It’s as though when life gets hard and the way ahead gets confusing, and we lose a sense of who we are, we almost need help from those who have come before us, those who have faced their own trials and hardships and emerged from them—it’s almost as though we need not to learn how to live, but to remember. Remember Lois. Remember Eunice. Remember yourself.

Frederich Beuchner, the wonderful writer who died this year talked about remembering as a “room.” We must, he wrote,

enter that still room within us all where the past lives on as a part of the present, where the dead are alive again, where we are most alive ourselves to turnings and to where our journeys have brought us. The name of the room is Remember—the room where with patience, with charity, with quietness of heart, we remember consciously to remember the lives we have lived.

I don’t want to make it sound like this is all easy. Remembering is hard and precarious. We don’t often go into that room that Beuchner talks about. And when we do remember, it’s often not that quiet, patient, charitable remembering he talks about. Our negative experiences stay with us longer than the positive ones. Trauma lingers. Painful memories bubble up when we don’t want them to. Instead of remembering being a blessing, it’s something we come to be

uncomfortable with, or even afraid of. We forget the things we want to remember. We remember the things we want to forget.

We also have trouble with our public remembering. One of the big ugly fights in our culture right now is over what, out of all the things in our past, should we remember? 1/3 of Americans believe God intended America to be a new promised land for European Christians. That's not exactly how indigenous people remember those same events—completely incompatible memories. There's a whole slew of bills appearing in state legislatures to shape the way school children learn about slavery. Most of them want teachers to not give deference to one side. As though we're better off if we remember human slavery as have two legitimate moral sides.

Sometimes we're rather mis-remember things that are painful. When we do so, we lose a sense of where we've come from and who we are.

Faith depends on remembering and remembering well.

Every week when we gather, we try to practice faithful remembering. We tell old stories that have been handed to us from generation upon generation. These old stories written by people in ancient times and faraway places somehow become stories about us and our lives in the present. When we remember these stories, its not just the ancestors who see the burning bush, or wrestle with an angel at night, or walk through the valley of the shadow of death—it is us.

Jesus is alive when we remember well. Those who heard him teach and saw him heal the sick and feed the crowds remembered him. They told stories about what he said and did, and people wrote them down so that we, too can follow.

Of course, we know Jesus, too, in this meal we celebrate today—a meal built around remembering. The night before he died, Jesus gathered his friends around him at a table as they'd done so many times together. But this time was different. Jesus said, "I'm going away. And you will miss me and you will wonder about me and you may even lose faith. Always, always come back to this table. When you do, take a piece of this broken bread and eat it. Take this cup and drink from it. And when you do, you will remember—not just me, you will remember yourself.

And so Jesus is here. And so is Jan and Kathleen, Sam and Max, George and Jean. Your saints, too. They're all here, even Lois and Eunice. They are helping us remember how to live.