

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONGREGATIONAL
Wallace, Idaho

Alice M.C. Ling, Pastor

All Saints Day

November 1, 2020

SONG “*For All the Saints*”

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Good morning, my friends. And welcome to worship. It’s good, once again, to gather together in the presence of God. On this All Saints’ Day, it’s good to remember and give thanks for the people in our lives who have pointed us toward God and helped us grow in faith. As always, it’s good to hear God’s Word for us and our lives, so that we can again dedicate ourselves to loving and serving God in the world.

A word of reminder that we will be sharing in the sacrament of communion, so if you haven’t brought something with you to use as the bread and the cup, this would be a good time to pause the recording so that you can get something. And as always, the PDF that accompanies this recording offers all of the words of this worship. If you want to print it or in some way have it available to you, you can more fully join with me in the songs, as well as the responsive and unison prayers. Let us join our hearts and minds together, and let us worship God.

CALL TO WORSHIP

There are many who have walked the path toward God before us, showing us the way with their lives.

We come to give thanks for them.

As they were called, so are we called to live as Jesus did, answering the call of God, saying, “Here I am! Send me.”

We come to ask for guidance and courage.

We are, each of us, like those who have gone before us, a strange mixture of saint and sinner. God accepts us that way and fills us with the Spirit, who empowers us to act.

We come to worship the Holy God.

SONG “*Rejoice in God’s Saints*”

Rejoice in God’s saints, today and all days; a world without saints forgets how to praise.
Their faith in acquiring the habit of prayer, their depth of adoring, Lord, help us to share.

Rejoice in those saints, unpraised and unknown, who bear someone’s cross or shoulder their own.
They shame our complaining, our comforts, our cares; what patience in caring, what courage, is theirs!

Rejoice in God’s saints, today and all days; a world without saints forgets how to praise.
In loving, in living, they prove it is true: the way of self-giving, Lord, leads us to you.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION (in unison)

God, for all the saints we give you thanks— for grandparents and godparents, for doctors and teachers, for coaches and pastors. God, for all the saints we give you thanks— for authors of books that have moved us, for friends whose one-time advice has guided us, for strangers who proved an example, for our children and the children of others who have given us courage. God, for all the saints we give you thanks— for those nearest and farthest away, for those who have died, and those who are living, for those who knew they made a difference, and those who never will. God, for all the saints we give you thanks. Amen. (Maren Tirabassi, *Before the Amen*)

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

SERMON

Well, we did it. We turned our clocks back last night. Even after seeing – and resonating with – all those Facebook memes that broadcast people’s protest: I don’t want to set my clock back on November 1st. 2020 has been long enough already. I’m not giving it one more hour! But we’re playing by the rules, so we set them back. You? On one level, it doesn’t matter this year. I don’t get to watch to see who missed the memo and shows up to church an hour early; and you can sit down with the video any time you want. Live your life in isolation long enough, and you get to choose whether you’re going to be on or off Daylight Savings. We’re so far out of whack and far away from anything even bearing a resemblance to normal, go ahead; do what you want and see if you can make it work.

When was the last time you caught a whiff of normal? I know we’re all making our own decisions about activities and interactions, what to do and how. Whether to go out to eat, and if so, which restaurants feel safe and which don’t. Which funerals, weddings, receptions, gatherings you choose to attend, and which you’re just not comfortable with. Are you going to the polls on Tuesday or have you already sent in your absentee ballot in order to avoid people? Vacations or travel? Grandchildren or parents? When we do dare see people we haven’t for awhile, is it okay to hug, or do we keep our distance and our hands in our pockets? And what about those holidays? The list is endless and all the way through it we sputter and squirm. We want this pandemic over; we want our lives back, and we want to know when we can expect things to return to normal.

So what is normal anyway? And who gets to define it? When we pull out passages like the one Joyce read a few minutes ago, I begin to wonder how Jesus defines “normal” and how much alignment there is between his understanding and ours. You see, the thing that’s striking to me about the Beatitudes is that Jesus isn’t asking us to do anything in particular. He doesn’t say, this is what you need to do, or how I want you to live. There’s no should’s or ought’s or Thou shalt’s in this passage, just a straight forward description of the way things are: this is the way the world works, this is normal – or at least, this is *God’s* normal. Debie Thomas writes: “In the Beatitudes, Jesus claims that the poor, the mournful, the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the pure-hearted, the peaceful, and the persecuted are “blessed.” They are the fortunate ones. The lucky ones. The ones whose lives are aligned with the heart and character of God. They are the ones who will enter heaven, experience comfort, inherit the earth, be filled, receive mercy, see God, and be called the children of God.” (“The Great Reversal”, *Journey with Jesus*)

She goes on from there to ask if we believe it, but as I hear Jesus speaking, it doesn’t really seem to me that it matters if I believe it or not. I don’t think it’s up for debate or negotiation. But I do think it’s fair

to ask how we feel about it, and how ready we are to sign up or seek a place in that realm of blessedness. As I observe us and our lives, it seems to me that very few of us aspire to be poor, mournful, meek, hungry, or persecuted; maybe merciful, pure-hearted and peaceful, but even those traits don't tend to rise to the top of the charts of values to be applauded and sought out. We celebrate strength and power, comfort and accumulations, accomplishments and success, independence and self-sufficiency. To quote Thomas again, "(We) live in a world where the loudest, strongest, wealthiest, and most privileged people prey on the "less fortunate." A world where greed and selfishness pay big time, while meekness, mercy and mournfulness earn little more than contempt. (We) live in a world where securing (our) own ease and comfort is (our) "right" – the rest of creation be damned."

When Jesus began his first block of teaching in the Gospel of Matthew, what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, he began by identifying as blessed those whose lives are aligned with the heart and character of God. He clearly says that as they seek out and hunger for justice and peace, for solace and healing, God meets them, holds them, walks with them, and uses them as a mirror that reflects the light and love of God for others. It seems to me that the committee who chose this text for All Saints Day is suggesting that it is precisely these categories of people who, while being identified as blessed, can also be thought of as saints. People in whom we meet the will and ways of God; people in whom we see the face of God; people who take into themselves the compassion and mercy, justice and peace, solace and healing that come from God and then make it their life's work to share those gifts with others.

I've been thinking a lot about a woman whose story I heard on the CBS Evening News. She works as a nurse in a Wisconsin hospital, in a COVID intensive care unit. She talked with Adriana Diaz about what her work is like, the pressure and exhaustion, the sense of frustration and intensity; and then she went on to admit that she has Type 1 diabetes, and is 19 weeks pregnant, either of which leave her highly vulnerable to contracting the virus. When Diaz questioned her and asked why she was working where she is, she admitted that it had been a hard choice; she knew she could transfer to a different unit and be safer, but here, she was part of the team where she draws support, and that was important to her. Then she went on to say that her husband had been in the military and served in Iraq; that as he talked about his service, he said that he had to be clear about what he was fighting for and stay focused on that in order to survive. She looked at Diaz and without a pause said, these people who are battling Covid are what I'm fighting for, they're why I'm here. Blessed. Blessed is she.

I also think of one of my cousins. She graduated from high school the same year I did, and just celebrated something like 47 years of marriage. She's a farm wife and has raised a large family; if Facebook tells the truth, she delights in being both a grandmother and a great grandmother. She also spent several years caring for her father, going to his home every day to make sure he ate, to deliver his mail, to keep him company. About a year ago, one of her children, an adult son died suddenly, I think of a brain bleed. She has grieved his death deeply; according to her older sister, for months, she was unable to even think about going back to work or figuring out how to carry on. Until her mother was placed in a care facility because of her memory issues and inability to live alone. When Covid hit and none of the family were allowed to go and see my Aunt Kay, Vickie got a part-time job there doing dishes – so that she can visit and maintain contact with her mother. Their 90 year old father spent some time in the hospital this summer and that was followed by a shift to a rehab center. He too was then separated from his kids by Covid precautions; unable to understand what happened and where they went, he declined and soon died in part because of the isolation. I learned the other day that while he was failing in isolation, Vickie was trying to get a job at his care facility, so that she could reach him as she was also reaching her mother. Blessed. Blessed is she.

Nearly nine months ago, our world was turned upside down by a global pandemic and all that was known as well as unknown about its spread. I think these months have brought out some of the very

best in people, as they cared for each other, shared food, offered kindness, made adjustments and went out of their way to lighten the load that others are carrying. I also think that some of what has been displayed in these months is far from our best, as people stomp their feet and assert their rights, refusing to be inconvenienced or sidelined for the sake of another. I've been left speechless by both exquisite generosity and unthinkable selfishness. It's an unusual moment of clarity and perspective on who we are as a people, and one that I pray we will observe and reflect on carefully.

Trust me when I say that I long for life to get back to normal as much as anyone else. But as I ponder what normal means, and whose normal I'm seeking – mine or God's – I pray we'll use the time we have to think about the world we want to get back to. What it would take for us to shape it more on God's model and less on our failed one? What would it look like for us to align our lives more closely with the heart and character of God? How ready are we to be embraced as God's blessed ones?

PRAYER REQUESTS

That people learn and practice the best ways to protect themselves and each other during this pandemic. For a great turn out for the election, and civility, tolerance, respect and peace toward each other for whatever the results may be.

Prayers for comfort and peace for the family of Phyllis Peters as they grieve her passing from this earth into God's kingdom.

Moisture for the raging fires that still burn, and for the fire fighters and emergency responders still on the front line.

For the homeless to find shelter as the seasons change...may people's compassion and love touch all of them...their lives are just as valuable and important as ours are...circumstances are the only difference.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Holy and beloved God, we thank you for the saints who have blessed our lives, and shown us your love and grace. The teachers who saw the best in us and encouraged our growth, coaches and mentors who believed in us far more than we ever could believe in ourselves; for parents and grandparents who loved us and cheered us on at every stage and new adventure; neighbors, aunts and uncles, siblings who stood in and offered what parents couldn't. For partners and spouses, friends and coworkers who see our best and our worst and stand by us, taking our hand, offering love, calming our fears, encouraging our dreams, knowing when to speak up and when to stay silent, how to speak the truth and when to shift into action. We give thanks for the ways in which our lives have been and continue to be blessed by messengers and companions who care for us while serving you.

We pray, O God, for the people of this country and of our world. For the soaring numbers of Covid cases that are spiking worldwide and far too close to home for our comfort. Show us how to protect ourselves and others, and give us the will and patience to do all we can as long as it takes. We pray for medical workers and hospitals on overload, for teachers and students, administrators and coaches that schools might be places of learning and safety, for people reeling from the economic devastation of unemployment and closed businesses. We pray for those who grieve the loss of a loved one, and that all of us might open our hearts to comprehend the loss of hundreds of thousands of Covid casualties. We pray for all those in the Gulf Coast running from yet another hurricane, for firefighters and emergency responders, for those forced to evacuate as fires approach, and all the unknowns of what will await them when the fire's out. We pray for the people of Turkey digging out once again from the collapse and crumble of an earthquake. And for all of the homeless, people on the streets for all the reasons we can imagine and those we can't, that they might find shelter and safety, and be seen by us rather than rendered invisible as we hurry by.

Holy God, as election day approaches, we pray yet again for our country, for those who seek office and those who vote, for the tensions and hostilities that have defined the campaign and placed so many on high alert. Give us wisdom and calm, peace and civility; by your mercy, give us ears to listen to one another, mouths with which we can speak words of truth with love, and hearts open to bridging divides. Give us the courage and compassion, gentleness and strength to seek unity in the midst of all of our diversity, and lead us into a new and brighter day.

Hear our prayers, spoken and unspoken. And hear us as we join our voices in the prayer that Jesus taught, saying: Our Father...

PRAYER OF OUR SAVIOR (debt)

OFFERING

I received a note recently from Art Fleming, reminding us that in the next two months the Food Bank will be helping people in our communities prepare to celebrate both Thanksgiving and Christmas. Each year these are the biggest months of food distribution, and anything we can do to help them in this vital ministry will be most welcome. They continue to have filled grocery bags available at both Harvest Foods and Steins, and those can be purchased any time. Or if you would like to make a cash donation through the church, write a note on an envelope or a check designating your gift for the food bank, and we'll see that the money gets where it needs to go. We all know that these are challenging times for many. On a regular basis, both the Osburn and Wallace Food Banks serve about 60 households a month, and another 15 in Mullan. I'm deeply grateful for the ways in which Alice Holmes represents us as a participant in this ministry, and for the ways the community comes together to address the needs of many of our members. Thank you for your gifts throughout the year and in the coming holiday season. And thank God for the ways in which God multiplies our gifts and blesses both the donors and the recipients through the outreach of the Food Bank.

SACRAMENT OF COMMUNION

Words of Invitation

The invitation is simple: come and eat of the feast. Not a meal to nourish the body, but to feed the soul.

We receive the bread and cup connected to the ages: to the saint of old who felt unworthy, to the seeker eager to know God, to the teenager who wonders what it's all about, to the child who eats with unburdened faith.

Woven into this time are the hopes and tears of generations. There is great joy here. No one is turned away for God is the host!

Communion Prayer

Tender, transforming God, you have invited us to gather at this table, to taste the feast, the same abundant promises offered to our ancestors in faith. Time and time again you've offered your grace. Even as we have stepped away, you continue to call us to be your people. You have never left us. We praise you for second, third, and fourth chances. You are ever-patient, always faithful. We give thanks for this time of celebration. For the One this meal remembers. for the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

With those who have gone before us, whose hands touched the bread, whose lips embraced the cup, we worship you. We glorify you.

God of all, send your Spirit to this place so that those gathered here, in this sacred moment, may know your presence. As we eat the bread and drink of the cup, make us one with the saints, and with our

sisters and brothers in faith around the world. Be with us God, not only here but in every moment of our lives. Help us to know you, to be guided by the Holy Spirit, and to live Christ, now and forever. Amen.

Sharing the Bread and Cup

Gathered with his friends, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them saying: “This is my body, broken for you. Take and eat.” As we break and share, take and eat, may we know the life—giving presence of God among us and within us.

In the same way, after supper, Jesus took the cup. He offered it in thanksgiving to God and then gave it to his friends, saying: “This is my blood, poured out for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” As we drink from Christ’s cup of blessing, may we know the transforming power of God at work within us.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison)

Creative, connecting God, you have sent your Spirit and made us the body of Christ; from child-like faith, to youthful energy, from middle-aged mindfulness, to elder’s wisdom. We thank you for this time, this remembrance. Increase our faith boldly! Help us to love boldly! Encourage us to act boldly! In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

SONG *“I Sing a Song of the Saints of God”*

I sing a song of the saints of God, faithful their whole lives through,
Who bravely labored, lived and died for the God they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor and one was a queen, and another a shepherd in pastures green:
They were saints of God, if you know what I mean. God, help me to be one, too.

They loved their God and they lived that love. It was loving that made them strong.
They did what was right, for Jesus’ sake, lived justly their whole lives long.
And one was a prophet, and one was a priest, and another was slain by a fierce wild beast;
there is no earthly reason, none in the least, why I shouldn’t be one, too.

They lived not only in ages past, there are hundreds of thousands still;
The world is filled with living saints who choose to do God’s will.
You can meet them in school, on the road or at sea, in a church, in a train, in a shop, or at tea:
for the saints are folk like you and like me, and I mean to be one, too.

BENEDICTION

The world now is too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but love.
May your eyes be so blessed you see God in everyone.
Your ears, so you hear the cry of the poor.
May your hands be so blessed that everything you touch is a sacrament.
Your lips, so you speak nothing but the truth with love.
May your feet be so blessed you run to those who need you.
And may your heart be so opened, so set on fire,
that your love, *your* love, changes everything.
And may the blessing of the God who created you, loves you,
and sustains you, be with you now and always. Amen.

(Black Rock Prayer Book)