



# SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR  
ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2017

THE SCRIPTURE TEXTS FOR THE FEAST OF ALL SAINTS' DAY ARE:  
REVELATION 7:9-17; PSALM 34: 1-10,22; 1 JOHN 3:1-3; MATTHEW 5:1-12

## A CHRIST-HAUNTED LANDSCAPE

*Revelation 7: 9-17* [After this I, John, looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing,

*"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."*

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

*"For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*]

Clergy are not supposed to play favorites, but I will confess that All Saints' Sunday is probably my favorite liturgical feast of the year. More than Christmas or Easter even, and every other Sunday which stands as a celebration of resurrection life. Of course,

there is beauty in all the others, and a distinct glory to Christmas and Easter in particular, which I like very much, but for me, none invites me into the mysteries of God quite so poignantly and profoundly as All Saints' does.

It has been said that the Feast of All Saints' thins the veil of divine mystery, opening a portal long enough to allow us to finger the pulse of our memories of those whom we love but see no longer.

We can savor the heavenly banquet's flavor a bit more presently on this day, trusting that by saying their names we can slip momentarily into their orbit of delight and know our earthly fears will not always hold their grave sway over us either.

We can touch the holy water, and feel the wet solace of the mark we make on our foreheads as we pass by the font, entering and leaving this sacred space, where the spirits of those who've gone before tender their encouraging wisps of solidarity as we work out our worship of God in our lives.

And we can hear the coos and cries of babies, held tenderly in the bosom of the church on this their baptismal day, when they are sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked as Christ's own forever.

All Saints' holds all this mystery and beauty and grace and truth, bound together in an invitation to step out of quotidian life and

mark time today in the hallowed space of this special feast when heaven and earth are pulled closer together, when what has been and what may yet be are gathered into the gift of a present moment of cosmic connection, knowing that we need not make our way alone.

Baptizing today reminds us of that.

Saying the names of those who have died today reminds us of that.

Gathering at the table for a holy meal today reminds us of that.

Crossing the threshold into the holy space of All Saints' reminds us of that. We need not make our way alone.

I remember when our children were young, and our church hosted a Halloween carnival, but very creatively moved beyond just the simple revelry of trick or treat, the costumes, and the sugar rush erupting into convulsions of frenzied activity blinding its victims to the wisdom of Halloween.

All Hallows' Eve, the Eve of All Saints', invites us to consider our fears—those things that cause our hearts to thump and skip with trembling and dread. Our costumes are meant to make light of them, make them a bit less terrifying, less potent.

I remember the invitation at the church carnival, for children and adults alike, was to draw on a piece of paper that of which I was most afraid. I drew a gun, I think because there had been a school shooting in the weeks leading up to that Halloween, and my children were in grade school. My fear was very real and no amount of frolicking around pumpkins would release me from its grip.

Instead, the church invited me to bring that fear in all its veracity with me as I turned into All Saints. A feast of celebration, yes, but somehow grave enough to hold my fears too, while being reminded I was not alone.

Each of us received a smudge of cruciform paint on our foreheads. It dried clear so you couldn't see it, until in a dark vestibule in the church, a fluorescent lamp was turned on, and we could see the sign of the cross on each other's foreheads. A reminder of our being sealed with God's spirit, and marked as Christ's own forever.

It was an indelible reminder that nothing in all creation, neither death nor life, nor angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor any powers...nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the

love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We need not make our way alone.

I wish for every child of God to know that prevailing truth.

Yes, there is much to fear in our time, in our lives. And we need our rituals to make sense of them, to even make light of them, but then we are invited to turn into this beautiful truth of belovedness, and know that we need not make this journey through the graveyard of our fears alone.

We have each other; we have this community; we have this Christ-haunted landscape that is a cathedral of divine presence; we have the communion of saints in whose company we make our way; we have Christ who is our portal into resurrected life, which is not so much about what happens after we die as it is about living in light of it here and now. That doesn't banish the fears of our lives, nor should it, but perhaps it casts light on them and on our lives such that the world, our world, is a little brighter, a little gentler, a little more hopeful.

This feast of All Saints' invites us to lean into the long and storied history of humanity's trek with God, crossing a threshold of divine

mystery that won't make sense most other days, but on this day we might just get a jolt of courage to breathe this exquisite air of mystical communion, and thereby know we are part of something much larger than ourselves.

So let the holy water light on your face and feel it as the touch of saintly encouragement this day.

Form the names of the dead on your lips and let them touch your life once more here.

Say amen to the baptismal prayers offered today for infants who cannot yet know what you may know—that the indelible mark of Christ on your forehead is a fierce one, for you and for them.

And for that may God's holy name be praised.  
Amen.



SAINT MARK'S  
EPISCOPAL CATHEDRAL

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