

Sermon - All Saints Sunday
Matthew 5:1-12
October 29, 2005
"A Way of Life"

In baptism, God accomplishes two things. The first and chief thing is the forgiveness of sins. Martin Luther said of Holy Baptism that in this sacrament, "*God forgives sin, delivers from death and the devil, and gives everlasting salvation to all who believe what he has promised.*" Luther added, in his explanation of the Lord's Supper, "*that where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation*". The second thing God accomplishes in baptism is that we are made members of the church, which is the body of Christ. You'll forgive me if I seem a bit irreverent, but I have at times considered this the greater of the two works of God – bringing and keeping sinners together in the church that is. An honest recollection and assessment of congregational life could force us look heavenward and say "*really God!*"

Still, that is what God has done. We are members of the church, baptized to live with one another so that we "*may proclaim the praise of God and bear his creative and redeeming word to all the world*". In explaining what baptism means for daily life Luther said; "*baptism means that our sinful self, with all its evil deeds and desires, should be drowned in daily repentance, and that day by day a new self should arise, to live with God in righteousness and purity forever*". In other words, we are baptized into a way of life. Our lesson today from Matthew 5 is the preamble to what is known as "*The Sermon on the Mount*". The sermon continues throughout Matthew chapters 5-7. Doing the things Jesus says in this sermon do not establish our relationship with God, but they do reflect it.

In Matthew 5:16, Jesus says to the crowd gathered "*in the same way, let your light so shine before others that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven*". Blessed are they....holy are they....saints are they....who embrace this way of life and the Lord who calls them to it - blessed because it describes a way of life that has anyone who would live it looking, thinking, and acting beyond themselves. Now few if any of the "*blesseds*" of Matthew 5 sound blessed if you're the only one being merciful, seeking peace, thirsting for righteousness or being slighted and insulted for your faith . But if you see them as shared experiences knowing there are others who have or had the same longings and struggles then you start to get a sense of why in baptism God not only made us members of heaven but also members of the church.

That is why we take the time to remember today folks who through baptism were joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus and made members of the church albeit in dramatically different ways this past year. That is why we'll name Roy, Lola Jean, Bill, George, Irene, John, Georgia Bea, Erika, Jack, Dorothy, Haakon, and Lillian today and remember they were once so joined to Christ, longed to live out their faith, and now are members of the church triumphant. That is why we'll name with Wesley James, Natalie Elizabeth and Clare Elizabeth. For them the joy of discovering Jesus awaits and we've the privilege as their congregation together with their parents helping them in that discovery.

But it's also why we don't forget the life together ever unfolding before us. In our service of baptism we welcome the newly baptized as "*workers with us in the kingdom of God*" precisely because we have work to do. All Saints Day is a wonderful time to pray about our future and on what blessing we receive when our way of life reflects the hope in us because of Jesus. That's what the saints of God have always done - look ahead with hope even as they look at everything around them with honesty – and know, just know that "*neither life or death shall ever from the Lord his children sever.*"

In our commitment to this way of life, I call upon you to give generously to the work we do together through our congregation – accepting that giving is both duty and delight. Christian stewardship is everything we do after we say "*I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit*" – it is one of the very most important ways we proclaim ourselves "*children of the same heavenly father and workers in the kingdom of God*" It is how we say we believe in the church – the "*communion of saints who have received the forgiveness of sins and await life everlasting.*" It is how we wait – expectantly, confidently, and gratefully.

I read a story about a bride who was extremely nervous before her wedding. To calm her, the pastor suggested she just concentrate on the aisle she'd walked down many times in her life. Just concentrate on the aisle, he said, the aisle. Then when you get halfway down, concentrate on the altar where you were baptized and received communion many times. Just concentrate on the altar, he said, the altar. Then, when you are almost to the front, you'll see the man whom you love and will spend your life with. Just concentrate on him, the pastor said, on him. The relieved bride began her processional walk, completely composed, but the guests sitting closest to the center wondered at what she was muttering to herself....*aisle....altar....him....aisle....altar....him.* They blushed, thinking this groom was in for some pretty big changes in his life!

None of us gets married thinking they will altar the person they are marrying. Yet that is exactly what God proposes to do for us when by faith and through baptism we are joined to his Son Jesus. God in baptism says "*I'll altar you....because of him*". From the day we are spiritually reborn in baptism, God's intent is to altar us. Dear Saint, pray about how you live. Pray for a deep and abiding appreciation of what it means to be part of this "*communion of saints*" – we call Calvary Lutheran – and what to our life together you can contribute to in the name that is above all names – Jesus. AMEN