

All Saints Sunday, C  
Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18  
Ephesians 1:11-23  
Luke 6:20-31

Melinda J. Wagner  
First Immanuel Lutheran Church  
Portland, Oregon  
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This year there seems to be a lot of interest in the Day of the Dead, a Mexican festival celebrated on Nov 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup>. Its origin goes back thousands of years to the Indigenous cultures of the Aztec and Mexica people. They believed the souls of the dead could visit the living, and each year they invited their loved ones to return home. Today, ancient beliefs blend with Roman Catholic tradition. Families create colorful home altars with candles and photographs of loved ones, to invite them to pay a visit from the other side. Families gather at gravesites to tell stories and share food and drink. It's a joyful, festive, friendly time when community somehow crosses over the boundary between death and life. (See NY Times *"What is Day of the Dead, the Mexican Holiday?"* <https://www.nytimes.com/article/day-of-the-dead-mexico.html>)

I'm not surprised this festival strikes a chord in the US. As the days grow darker, we become more reflective. This is a season when grief and longing come forward for many of us – certainly it's true for me, just over a year now since we lost my parents. The older we get, the more loved ones we have on the other side of death's gateway. Isn't it beautiful to think of communing with our loved ones just once more? Sharing love and thanks, receiving wisdom and encouragement, saying what we didn't get to say, just being together again.

All Saints' Sunday is our Lutheran way of communing with those who have gone before. We pray their names today, we light candles to remember, we sing with thanks and praise toward God for these special ones. And for as much as All Saints is a personal festival, it is also a churchwide festival, celebrating how God's people are united throughout all time in the mystical body of Jesus Christ. We have our own version of a family meal in every worship service, not just today. Whenever we celebrate the meal of Holy Communion together, we believe we are not just united with Christ, we are also united with Christ's followers of every time and place, in the mystical body of Christ. Holy Communion crosses over the boundary between death and life, uniting all of us in God's eternal love. I find that both awe-inspiring and wonderfully hopeful.

The Roman Catholic Church created the festival of All Saints to honor a wide variety of officially-designated saints and martyrs, but Martin Luther helped us to understand that we are all God's saints. We are all made holy through God's gracious, unconditional love. Even more than this, Martin Luther taught that we are saints and sinners at the

same time. No person is perfect – we can't be, we're not meant to be – we are all sinners, fallible, human, all of us completely dependent on God's forgiveness. At the same time, all of us are saints, made alive, made sacred through God's loving acceptance and grace. We are set apart for a life that imitates our Lord.

In this historic sanctuary, I can't help but think of all the generations who have been set apart for this Christian life since First Immanuel was founded in 1879. It's been 143 years this December, which amounts to 6 or 7 generations of people influenced through this congregation to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

One of our members, Maydoris Ritchey, celebrated her hundredth birthday this week -- our most senior member! In this newspaper photo from 1934 there are two children in costumes, preparing to present a play at Maplewood School. One child is Maydoris (Lindquist, she was then) and the other is Lester Fredrickson – the father of Kent Fredrickson, who grew up at First Immanuel, descended from an early pastor, Pastor Skans. Lester would also have been 100 this year. Think of all the joys and sorrows and opportunities a person can experience in a century! But even a century is only the blink of an eye in God's long and loving history with human beings.

Jesus invites all of us sinner-saints into a way of life that literally turns the world upside down. In today's scripture from Luke, Jesus pronounces blessings and woes that challenge everything we know about human society. He speaks relief to people who are in trouble – the poor receive God's kin-dom, the hungry are filled, those who weep will laugh. He also speaks warning to those who are already satisfied – those who right now are rich, full, and highly-respected – warning their good fortune will not last forever.

God doesn't value people the way the world does – God values people much better. All people. In Christ's vision, struggling people are lifted up. Enemies are loved. People treat each other the way they themselves wish to be treated. This is the new social reality Christ lays out for us. These are our values when we walk in Christ's footsteps. Sometimes we will find ourselves among the blessed, other times we will experience all kinds of woes, but throughout everything Christ calls us to a higher way, to honor, respect and serve our fellow human beings in the spirit of God's love.

This is the new reign and new kin-dom that Jesus creates for us. The rule of radical love and generous justice. I have no doubt that among the saints who are remembered by today's lighted candles and prayers, many have reflected these "new kin-dom" values. Some we remember for their caring and love. Some for their generosity and giving. Some for their laughter and joy. Some for the tears they shed on behalf of those in need. We can look at someone's life and say, "Yes, I can see the marks of God's reign

and rule there. I am witness to the signs of God's spirit of blessing there." And we pray these kin-dom signs are seen in our lives too.

I'd like to close with a prayer by Steve Garnass-Holmes called *All Saints Day*:

God of grace,  
For all the saints who have made this world a better place  
I give you my praise.  
For the saints who have loved me, I give you thanks.  
For those who blessed me without my knowing,  
who loved me from behind the curtain, I bless you.  
For the ones who forgave my selfishness,  
who embraced my loneliness, who understood my fear,  
I praise the mystery of your grace.  
For the ones who blessed others, and the ones who blessed *them*,  
by whom my world was improved, I thank you.  
For the ones who never knew they blessed me,  
who shone with light they themselves didn't see, I thank you.  
And for those who tried and fell short, I give thanks.  
For those whose unconquered struggles taught me,  
whose courageous failures inspired me,  
whose attempts at grace, despite their crudeness, achieved grace,  
I thank you.  
For the saints who picked my fruit and sewed my shirts,  
who built my world without thanks or pay, I humbly praise.  
Bless all the saints in whose blessing I live.  
And now sanctify me, dear God,  
that I may be a blessing to others.  
Amen.

by Steve Garnaas-Holmes, *Unfolding Light*, [www.unfoldinglight.net](http://www.unfoldinglight.net),  
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