

A Glimpse of Grace

In the Gospel lesson this morning, we heard about Zacchaeus – a wealthy tax collector who climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see Jesus as He passed through Jericho. When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and said, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today,” (Luke 19:5). That invitation changed everything. Zacchaeus’ heart was transformed. His greed gave way to generosity. His isolation was traded for fellowship, and his guilt was transformed to grace. Jesus declared, “Today salvation has come to this house,” (verse 9).

On this All Saints’ Sunday, we celebrate that same saving grace – the grace that reached Zacchaeus in the branches, the grace that found us, and the grace that now gathers all the saints – past and present – into one household of faith. All Saints’ Sunday isn’t just about us remembering those who have gone before us – though that’s a big part of it – it’s also about recognizing that the love of Jesus continues to reach into every life. His love continues to transform hearts, and calls us all into the family of God. So let’s turn to one of Paul’s letters, to think more about this. If you have your Bible, or Bible app handy, turn with me to 2 Thess. 1:1-12. **Read 2 Thess. 1:1-12.**

Paul has some powerful words that he shares with the Church at Thessaloniki. His letter opens by identifying that he’s the author of it, along with Silas and Timothy. “Paul, Silas, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace to you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” (2 Thess. 1:1-2). He opens with a blessing of grace and peace from God to the church.

Giving Thanks for the Saints

He elaborates on this, saying, “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing,” (verse 3). Paul begins his letter to the church with gratitude. He’s not grateful for their comfort or success. He’s thankful for their spiritual growth. He says, “We ought always to thank God for you.”

He gives thanks because he sees the unmistakable signs of life in the Thessalonian church – faith that is growing more and more and love that is increasing. The Thessalonians were an ordinary group of people living through difficult times. Paul saw evidence of God’s grace among them. Their faith was alive. Their love was expanding. In the same way, we give thanks today for the saints whose lives reflected that same growing faith and increasing love – those who taught Sunday School, sang in the choir, served on committees, prayed faithfully, brought meals to neighbors, and quietly loved people into the Kingdom of God.

The United Methodist Church affirms that we belong to “the communion of saints.” We are part of a fellowship that transcends time and space, that unites

believers on earth with those who dwell with Christ in glory. Every time we worship, we join that vast company. So today we pause to give thanks for all those who have entered the Church Triumphant – those whose faith has now become sight.

Faith That Endures Trials

Paul goes on. “Therefore, among God’s churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring,” (verse 4). The people of the Thessalonian church weren’t living easy lives. They faced hardship, misunderstanding, and persecution. But we see here that Paul celebrates their “perseverance and faith.”

Faith that endures is faith that has been tested. The saints we remember today knew something about that. They experienced seasons of loss, illness, and disappointment, yet their faith remained steady. They didn’t give up on God. And they didn’t give up on the Church.

Their faith became an anchor for those who came after them. Through their trials, their faith deepened – and their love increased. As Charles Wesley wrote in one of our hymns, “Come, let us join our friends above who have obtained the prize, and on the eagle wings of love to joys celestial rise. Let saints on earth unite to sing with those to glory gone, for all the servants of our King in earth and heaven are one.”¹ When we endure in faith, we join hands across generations with that same great company of witnesses who have kept the faith through every storm.

Love Increasing – the Mark of the Church

Paul rejoices that “the love all of you have for one another is increasing,” (verse 3). He’s not talking about emotional lovey-dovey stuff. He’s talking about love as a way of life. It’s love that forgave, served, and gave sacrificially. It’s the kind of love Jesus showed when He laid down His life for the whole world. A church where love is increasing is a church alive with the Spirit.

It may not be perfect – there is no perfect church here below – but it’s being perfected in love. John Wesley described Christian perfection as being “filled with love of God and neighbor.” When we hear the term “Christian perfection,” we may be tempted to think he was talking about sinless living. He wasn’t. We did a book study about this a few years ago. Wesley even states that people usually don’t stop sinning on this side of eternity until they’re on their deathbeds. Instead, he was trying to make the point that we should be growing deeper and deeper in love with God, and from that, naturally, we show greater and greater love and concern for all our neighbors.

That’s the kind of love the saints modeled for us. They reached out to the lonely, cared for the sick, taught the young, welcomed the stranger, and bore one another’s burdens. Their love didn’t end when they left this world. It continues to ripple through this local church, and through us. God multiplies love through His people – generation after generation.

¹ Charles Wesley, “Come, Let Us Join Our Friends Above,” *The United Methodist Hymnal*, (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing, 1989), page 709.

Remembrance and Communion

In just a moment, we'll gather together again at the Lord's Table. Where we experience grace, where we remember, and where we commune with God. There we remember Christ's words. "Do this in remembrance of Me," (Luke 22:19). We remember His love poured out for us in His life, death, and resurrection. And we remember all those saints who have come before us – those whose shoulders we now stand on, who helped bring us thus far – whose prayers and songs once filled this place.

In The Great Thanksgiving, we proclaim, "And so, with Your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise Your name and join their unending hymn: Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of Your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest."² That's what happens every time we come to the Table – heaven and earth meet.

The saints are with us, in spirit. The same grace that sustained them sustains us. The same Spirit that filled them fills us now. When we receive the bread and cup, we join together with the whole communion of saints – past, present, and future – in proclaiming the mystery of faith. "Christ has died; Christ is risen; Christ will come again." This holy meal reminds us that love is stronger than death. It reminds us that the fellowship of believers all over, and in every age, never ends.

Living Worthy of the Call

Paul prays at the end of our epistolary lesson today. He states:

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of His calling, and that by His power He may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ, (2 Thess. 1:11-12).

That's our calling, too – to live in such a way that Jesus is glorified in us. To live "worthy of the call" means to let Christ's love shine through us – to forgive as He forgave, to serve as He served, to give as He gave. It means to let our love keep increasing until it overflows into the world around us. That's how the saints lived. And that's what we're called to do today.

The saints we honor today lived that out in their own, quiet ways. They weren't perfect. But they were faithful. They were teachers, farmers, and gardeners; parents and grandparents, nurses, and soldiers. They were helpers and encouragers. Their names may not be in history books, but they're written in the Book of Life!

The Roll Call of the Saints

Today we pause to remember by name people of our church family who have entered eternal rest since last All Saints' Sunday, and others who we also miss. We

² Word and Table: Service I, "The Great Thanksgiving," *The United Methodist Hymnal*, page 9.

remember those who have finished their course in faith and now rest from their labors. After each name, if you knew these saints, I invite you to respond, “Present with the Lord.” When we finish, I’ll say a prayer, and give you a brief silent time of holy remembrance for the saints near and dear to your hearts before we go on.

Marcia Atkinson	Beth Cable	Roland Kellar
Darlene Hall	Barb Massey	Donnie Hall
Carolyn Stone	Susan Fry	Bob Berryman
Virgil Lykins	Tom Larger	Gabe Meyer
Carol Ann Slagle	Sandi Bowman	Larry Slagle
Jan Wiford	Tom Rossiter	Shirley Sheffer
Erma Cotterman	Becky Wacker	Connie Kauffman
Keith Motter	Janet Motter-Knasel	Larry Greer
Royal Cotterman	Delbert Doak	Cheryl Roy
Jeanette Winemiller	Ken Roy	Bob Morris
Scott Sheffer	Lowell Mohler	Wayne Siferd
Leland Wiford	Florance Bass	Elwood Siferd
LaDonna Wiford	Bob Swob	Mary McLarey
Horace Bass	Logan Berryman	Janice Doak
Rowena Mohler		

Are there any other names you want to lift up this morning? All of these are now present with the Lord.

Prayer: We give You thanks, O Lord, for all Your saints who have gone before us. We sense the nearness of that great cloud of witnesses surrounding us even in this moment. Grant that we, encouraged by their example, may run with perseverance the race that is set before us, and dwell with them in Your eternal glory. Amen. ***Silence, and then –***

Our Hope and Our Future

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that God’s justice and glory are sure. There will come a day, he says, when Christ will be glorified in His holy people and marveled at among all who believe (verse 10). All Saints Sunday points us toward the promised future – a day when death will be no more, when sorrow and pain will cease, and when all of God’s children will gather around the throne of grace.

The Book of Revelation describes it this way, “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands,” (Rev. 7:9). That is our future, friends! Until that day comes, we keep believing, we keep serving, and we

keep loving. Our faith grows more and more. Our love increases – and Christ is glorified through it all!

You know, when Zacchaeus came down from the tree, he wasn't the same man. Grace had found him. Love had increased within him. That's really the story of every saint. Saints aren't born holy. They're made holy by God's grace. And that same grace is at work in us here today.

Becoming Tomorrow's Saints

We are the saints-in-progress. We're the ones still learning to see Jesus clearly, still learning to love more deeply. Someday, others will remember us. I wonder what they will say about us.

I hope that they say – that they remember – that our faith was growing more and more. And that our love for one another was increasing. And that we loved God, and every stranger – every neighbor – we ever met.

That's the legacy of the saints. And it's also the invitation of All Saints Sunday. For us to live so faithfully that when our names are read, someone may whisper, "Present with the Lord," and know it is true.

Prayer: Gracious God, We give You thanks for the great cloud of witnesses who surround us – for those whose faith shaped our own, whose love pointed us to Jesus, and whose lives continue to inspire us. Help our faith grow more and more, and our love for one another to increase. Make us worthy of Your calling, and by Your power bring forth every desire for goodness and every deed prompted by faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in us, and we in Him. And as we come to Your table today, we remember that we're one with the saints in every time and place. Light our hearts on fire for You, Lord. Through Your name we pray. Amen.