**St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church**

**All Saint’s Day (Observed)**

**Wisdom of Solomon 3: 1-9**

**Psalm 24**

**Revelation 21:1-6a**

**John 11: 32-44**

**For All the Saints**

If you’ve been around any mainstream church, no matter its denomination, you will be well aware of what we call, the Easter Triduum. The Paschal Triduum (Holy Triduum) of Easter, moves as one single liturgy from sundown on Maundy Thursday to sundown on Easter Sunday. As such, as all the faithful come to understand, you can’t get to Easter without Good Friday, and you can’t get to Good Friday without Maundy Thursday. Even the most unchurched have a sense that something is happening in the church during this time.

There is another Triduum, of which, I would venture to say, far less people are aware. We have just lived through, what the Church calls, Allhallowstide of 2021. It’s hard for us to grasp it as easily as we do at Easter, because here we are, like the rest of the Church on November the 7th, celebrating one part of a deeply profound time, which began a week ago today. Truth be told, the three days of Allhallowstide as completely eclipsed and engulfed by a secular festival, even though grown out of ancient faith-filled origins, which we now call Halloween.

The first part of this Allhallowstide begins with All Hallows Eve. The Celts called it the night of Samhain (Sau-ihn), which means “hallowed” or “holy” as in, “Our Father, “hallowed” be thy name.” It was placed at the edge of the coming of winter, a time of darkness.

Over time, and through various iterations and contractions, we are the happy recipients of the name we know as Hallowe’en, (Halloween) via the ancient customs brought to the United States from Scottish and Irish Celts.

People look forward to Halloween. What’s not to like about the opportunity to dress up in costume and to receive treats. From child to adult, there seems an opportunity to play with ideas we would normally steer far away from, such as skeletons, ghosts, scary creatures, or whatever it is that goes bump in the night, and it provides an opportunity to string up some lights to brighten the encroaching darkness of winter. In truth, one is supposed to offer treats to keep the evil away, the trickster who could turn life upside down. The ancient Irish Celts celebrated All Hallow’s Eve by carving turnips and placing little lit candles in them. Then they would walk from house to house asking for food in exchange of prayer offered in honor of those loved ones passed from their earthly life. The celebrants moved through the night, carrying the light of hope with them, into the dawn of a new day. A recollection, perhaps, of Easter morning.

Unlike the moveable feast of Easter, however, All Hallows' Eve falls on the 3st of October each year; the day before All Hallows' Day, also known as All Saints' Day, which is followed on the 3rd day by All Souls Day on November 2nd. The theme of light overcoming darkness continues… banishing the shadows of our fears……brought to this day through hallowed tradition.

Regrettably, the three days of Allhallowstide have been conflated into a single opportunity for people, through their own decorations and carvings, in pumpkins or gourds, to emphasize their own particular fantasies and fears.

The meaning of the three days seems lost, but we can think a bit about it and try to bring some understanding of why it is, with variations on the theme of light overcoming darkness via some ritual or another, the world continues to enter into this universal theme of All Hallow’s Eve.

Whether personified through a theme of trick or treat, or stories and dreams which wake one up with a jolt in the middle of the night, all of these images are dispelled with lights as the night of All Hallow’s Eve melts into the morning dawn of All Saints’ Day.

Perhaps, it is at this time, this Allhallowstide, that we think most about time, the passing of time, and the time when time ends for each of us as it must. We don’t much like to think about the aspect of time running out, and yet the reality of time is always held deeply within our psyches. In all humanity lies a fear of death, and we do all we can to deny its existence, even to confronting it with costume, revelry, humor and carved pumpkins designed to scare away the evil spirits, the messengers of danger and doom.

With their lighted turnip “Jack 0’ Lanterns”, the ancient celebrants were, and are, celebrants of the Holy, with the continuing emphasis of the theme of light over darkness. And yet All Hallow’s Eve gently gives way, having prepared us for All Saints’ Day, a time of celebration for all the Saints gone before, all those to whom we turn for inspiration in the living of our own lives. We give thanks for the gifts they left behind; their legacies and spiritual batons for us to pick up and carry forward. We think of them as the Communion of Saints, or as a great “cloud of witnesses,” Those whose time has come and gone, and yet are spiritually constant in the light of our God who is always present in the here and now.

We can trace images of the saints throughout the scriptures. We can read of the saints in glory, where time is no more. We can find them in the company of angels before the throne of God. Or, we can be reminded, as the Epistle to the Hebrews urges us “since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses,……. let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:1-2.) We can look back to the beginning of time until the present time, to find all those who have given their lives, sometimes under torture and death for their faith. And, as we view them, we think of the Beatitudes and the “hallow-ness” of the Saints.

‘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 for my sake. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Beatitudes personify the qualities of all the saints, past and present, who lived and live into each new day, as we, too, receive the gift of each new day. As people of God, we can think of the Holy, the “hallowed” possessing all of these qualities, just as Jesus, as God. Perhaps we can find elements of each of these qualities within in every one of ourselves.

After all, we are counted among the saints as those who are serving and responding to the Good News in their own time. They were then, and are now. We acknowledge their presence in both of our Creeds , “I/We believe in the communion of saints.” In other words, we believe in fellowship across the world with whatever people have strived for, or are striving for, or have given or are giving their lives for in the name of faithful service, past, present and future.

While we hold in our mind single individuals, we also envision also the entire company of people, communion of saints. To think of the “communion of Saints” opens up a mixture of visions of what that communion must look like and memories of that which we understand and know.

Regardless of how we envision the Saints, we can feel reassured that we are surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses even when we feel alone. When we feel overwhelmed, we are surrounded by the community of the Church and to a vast community beyond, reaching as far as to those whose faith is known to God alone. That’s what that means to belong to the community of saints.

Major Saints become known to us through the scriptures, but in our calendar of “Holy Women, Holy Men” we discover ordinary people rooted in faith. We think of people in our own time, alive or now living in glory, who know nothing else other than to bring their huge visions into reality, led forward always by unfailing faith. The opportunity is open to us all.

If All Saints’ Day is the central anchor in this Autumn Triduum, then it leads us to the commemoration of All Souls’ Day, a day when we remember those who formed us, who molded us. We remember them for the many experiences we had with them, perhaps learned from them. We give thanks to our nearness to the faithful departed, and also to “those who faith is known to God alone.”

This third day of All Hallows Tide, All Souls’ Day, also thought of as the Commemoration of all the Faithful Departed, is a day of memories, gratitude to those we have known and loved. We are led to remember all those who are part of what we now think of as the “communion of Saints” and our particular association with them, in time past. within the life of our God who is always in the present tense.

Jesus said, “do this in remembrance of me.” “Remember.” When Jesus said these words, he was not talking about us merely remembering him, he was talking to and about his disciples, and all of us, as the ones who would carry on the work of delivering the Good News to the world. Jesus handed on this baton of faith, fashioned in memory, but destined to continue moving into the future. Much as does All Saints’ Day, All Souls’ Day allows us to live in the context of time, past, present and future in all of our creative memories.

To quote T. S. Eliot in the opening lines of the first of his Four Quartets”

**"Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future/ And time future contained in time past. If all time is eternally present/ All time is unredeemable."[[1]](#footnote-1)**

We tend to think of time like a river flowing ever forward. It’s a subjective perspective and, thus if time is flowing forward, then the whole span of time, along with all actual events, has already transpired and nothing we will ever do or say can alter the past, or the future.

All Soul’s Day is a day of reflection, as we think and look back, but it is also day of looking forward with intention. It is a day that speaks to us about our personal intention looking forward. What is your cause? What is your journey forward for the life of one another and for the life of this planet? What gifts will you leave behind or carry with you into sainthood?

And so, we celebrate the Tridduum of Allhallowstide, even if a week beyond. All Hallow’s Eve,which has come to us from ancient days, as our ancestors handed down to us the powerful weapons of humor and light to confront the power of darkness and death. All Saints’ Day, the time when we are made witness to the victory of amazing good works and those who worked them, triumphing yet again over the darkness and all evil that may dwell there, until we come to All Souls’ Day, when we acknowledge our common mortality expressed in our expectations of a shared eternity.

So next year on October 31st, don’t hold back on confronting your own need to gloss over Allhallowstide. Don’t hold back on confronting your own fears of death, or your own hope of everlasting glory and eternal life. Don’t hold back on believing in that powerful reward for faith. Don’t hold back on believing that life is eternal, no matter how many times we falter in our faith. But above all, don’t hold back on understanding the real and absolute underlined meaning of Allhallowstide. Don’t allow this season of ghosts, and saints and souls, to sink into a sea of carved up pumpkins with no understanding of what they stand for: our very human fear of death and our need for faithful hope in eternal light of life in the presence of God.

As Christians we dare to look and hope beyond life as we know it. No matter the season or the feast or festival, no matter where or how interpreted, be it Allhallowstide, Christmas or Easter, or whatever else. In a world that seeks only to satisfy itself as if there were no tomorrow, let us dare to live in expectation that tomorrow, filled with gratitude, we will find ourselves, like the Saints before us, walking into the light of God’s heavenly plane, among that great cloud of witnesses: the peaceful presence of the Communion of Saints.

Amen

Written to the Glory of God

E. J. R. Culver+

November 7, 2021

***"For All the Saints"*** *was drafted as a processional hymn by the Anglican* ***Bishop of Wakefield, William Walsham How.*** *The hymn was first published in 1864.*

1 For all the saints who from their labors rest,
who Thee by faith before the world confessed;
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

2 Thou wast their Rock, their Fortress, and their Might;
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true Light.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

3 O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

4 And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong.
Alleluia, Alleluia!

6 From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
in praise of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Alleluia, Alleluia

**T. S. Eliot: from *Four Quartets***

And time future contained in time past.
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable.
What might have been is an abstraction
Remaining a perpetual possibility
Only in a world of speculation.
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.
Footfalls echo in the memory
Down the passage which we did not take
Towards the door we never opened
Into the rose-garden. My words echo
Thus, in your mind.
But to what purpose
Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves
I do not know.
Other echoes
Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow?”
<...>
Go, said the bird, for the leaves were full of children,
Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.”

1. T. S. Eliot *Four Quartets* (Mariner Books, Houghton, Mifflin Harcourt, Boston, New York), 1943, 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)