

All Saints

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[0:00] Amen. As you know, All Saints Day was on the 1st.

We remember the big S saints as well as the little S saints. And so a lot of times we combine what has grown up to be called All Souls Day on November 2nd with All Saints Day November 1st.

We remember those who made a name for themselves as saints. And we also remember those who didn't particularly leave a name but were saints. And so during the prayer time, when we come to commemoration of the dead, you may want to give names of people who have died in the last year in Thanksgiving for their lives together.

Well, who here likes being tested? Oh, Maria likes being tested.

How about pop quizzes? You like pop quizzes? Yeah, some of you do. All right, take out a sheet of paper. No, you're not going to take out a sheet of paper.

[1:34] Okay. Well, pop quizzes. This is what the Sadducees did with Jesus that day, didn't they? It was not only a pop quiz, but it was a trick question.

I hate when that happens. A trick question. Well, let's talk. This story speaks us.

It speaks to us on several levels. It speaks to us on marriage. And it speaks to us on after our life here ends. So what does that passage say from the gospel today?

You have to look at it from two perspectives. You have to look at it from the perspective of the Sadducees and look at it from the perspective of Jesus. Now, the Sadducees were a priestly class of people back in Jesus walking around days.

And they believed only in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. And if you couldn't prove it in there, it didn't even have anything to do with them.

[2:43] Now, they misread the Pentateuch and decided that there was no afterlife. There was no resurrection. You live, you die. Boom. Somebody else takes over.

And so they didn't even want to hear about the afterlife. Well, Jesus was trouble. Because he talked about the afterlife. He was upsetting the apple cart.

Another thing about the Sadducees was they were fairly wealthy. And they did not want anybody upsetting anything because the Roman soldiers might come in and do them all in.

And their position might be violated. So they basically wanted to get rid of Jesus. They had to be careful how they did that. Because most of the population in Jerusalem thought he was at least a prophet and maybe a Messiah.

So they had to try to trick him into saying something that obviously held no water. And they came after him this time with a really foolish question.

[3:50] So they said, all right. So they wanted to make resurrection look ridiculous. So in Moses' day, Moses had a rule that if a man married a woman and he died before they had any children, if he had a brother, the brother was required to marry that woman and have children on behalf of his older brother, usually older brother.

So that was kind of a rule. And so they said, all right, now here's what's going on. Young man and young woman got married. Before they had any children, he died. So, Moses says, a brother must marry her.

So a brother married her. No children died. Third brother, fourth, fifth, sixth, seven brothers married that woman. This might be called the story of the wife and seven husbands.

Can you imagine wives? No, what can I imagine? Most wives say, I can barely handle one husband.

Okay, so they all died. And so they say to Jesus, now in the resurrection, whose wife is she? Because all seven had her as a wife.

[5:09] They're trying to show any belief in heaven as ridiculous. Jesus understands that. But see, from his perspective, he knew what it was like in heaven, didn't he?

He came from there. And so he replies very evenly to them, you know, I think you're thinking that heaven is going to be like earth.

But it's not. In heaven, people don't get married. They're not angels, but they're like angels. They're equal to angels.

And so your whole question makes no sense. And in fact, he says, regarding this afterlife thing you're trying to quiz me on, do you remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

Oh, yes, you remember them because that's all you believe is the Pentateuch. Well, what did God say when he talked to Moses? He said, I am, I am, quote, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[6:18] He didn't say, I was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They're still alive. Well, the Sadducees hear this, and there's no way they can come at him.

He has just signed and sealed and passed the pop quiz. And so the lawyers, and it's always good to have a good lawyer around. One of the lawyers says, you have spoken well, Jesus.

And that ended. That was the last trick question they asked him. What happened after that? He went to the cross. This happened on what we call Holy Week.

So he's just a couple of days from the cross when he tells that, gives them that answer. So that's what that whole event says. Now, as we always have to do when we read a passage from God's Bible, what does it have to do with us?

What does it mean to us? So let's talk about that. We're shifting to the second point. Well, it definitely has to do with us now, and it definitely has to do with us after we die.

[7:30] It's got something to do with marriage. We can tell that. So, first of all, let's talk about marriage as God created it.

It's to be between a man and a woman. It was to be exclusive. In other words, my body belongs to my wife and no one else.

Her body belongs to me and no one else. It's exclusive. It's meant to be physically pleasing. It's meant to be emotionally naked.

It's meant to be intellectually sparring together with feelings. Sparring, I don't mean arguing.

Sparring together with feelings. That's the way God created marriage.

That's how we interpret it as we look at marriages in the Bible. And that's how we look as we try to live in present-day culture that seems totally oblivious to the whole purpose for marriage.

[8:35] Okay. So, when we look at it from the point of view of Jesus, we get a sample of what God wants with every person.

He wants a marriage kind of relationship with every person. When we look at the epitome of what marriage is supposed to be, we get the word intimacy.

When we look at how God wants to relate to us, we see intimacy. That's why in the Scripture, the church is talked about as the bride and Jesus is talked about as the groom.

He wants to wed us. We see how that's happened in the past. But we see how God wants to relate to us is how Jesus wants to relate to us.

We look back in the Old Testament and we see this happening. Abraham. In Genesis 17. A touching exchange. About how God covenants with Abraham.

[9:50] He talks to Abraham. Abraham talks back to him. Throughout Abraham's whole life, he talks to God. God talks to him.

Touching intimate moments. We look at Abraham's son, Isaac. In Genesis 26. God speaks to Isaac. He said, That which I did with your father, I'm going to do with you.

I'm going to bless your people. Other exchanges. Isaac builds an altar to the Lord who has just spoken to him.

He calls him Lord. And then we get to the next son down. Jacob. The deceiving one. Who God renames Israel.

Do you remember Jacob in the highway? Right? The stairway to heaven? God speaks to him in a dream. And there is heaven. The Sadducees missed that part.

[10:51] There is heaven. And Jacob wakes up and says, I have been visited by the Lord. And he takes a rock for an altar. And he pours oil on it.

And he prays to God. A remembrance of what God has done with him. Through the centuries, God has sought to be intimate with us.

Jesus wants to relate to you intimately. As he speaks to you and as you listen to him. So on All Saints Day, we remember that intimacy that we've seen down through the Christian centuries. And even in our just past century and flowing into the 2000s, we think about John Paul II, Pope John Paul II. He's on the verge of becoming a saint.

According to the Roman Catholic canonization process. Well, the point of his sainthood is constant prayer. They said that John Paul II was always in prayer.

[11:57] They mean the people who were around him. He would be speaking to you and he's speaking to God. They never remember a time when he was not in prayer. I can't hit that target.

I'd like to, but I can't. Right now I can't. Maybe someday I will. A second saint, much like him, was called Padre Pio. Anybody hear of Padre Pio?

Yeah, he was a great 20th century saint. He related intimately to God by relating to people in the confession booth. He spent so many hours in the confession booth that he had calluses on his knees.

That's the main reason he was proclaimed a saint. He didn't have a whole lot of time to be personally involved with God. He related to God intimately by offering forgiveness and confession on behalf of God to his people.

Have you ever had someone just give you assurance that you're forgiven, especially after you've done something really, really stupid? Yes. Thank you. Well, that's a gift God gave Padre Pio in his sainthood.

[13:17] He gives some of us that same gift to give people assurance that God loves them in spite of the fact that in the past they've made major mistakes.

And then the last saint. Now this saint relates to all of us. Mother Teresa. Mother Teresa. Now we only think of Mother Teresa of Calcutta as taking care of the poor and the dying in India.

It's only been lately we've heard about her interior spiritual life. It was trash. She had a tough time relating to God.

She said there were periods where she was not even sure he was there. but she kept on doing the work representing Jesus for the dying and the poor.

She's a little bit more like me. Now I don't have long periods where I wonder if God's there. But I have times where it gets kind of dry prayer-wise. And sometimes my prayers start Our Father if you're there.

[14:24] But sainthood has to do with how we can respond to the God who wants to be intimate with us. Now I'm no great shakes guy.

Let me tell you. Much of me is still a hick from the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains. Let me just tell you the truth. But God chose to be intimate with me.

I don't know why. But he did. And he seeks to be intimate with me even today. I first actually had a belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior about almost 50 years ago.

And I've been on that road for a long time. It goes up and it goes down. It goes up and it goes down. And that's what the life of a saint is.

And that's what intimacy is. And that's what intimacy between a husband and wife is. It's not all... I'd love that.

[15:34] But it goes up and it goes down. It goes up and it goes down. And that's what sainthood is. And that's what intimacy is. And that's what God wants for us. You see, we moved out to heaven.

Listen, I don't know if God has on your schedule an intimate marriage with another person. I don't know. What I do know is He's got on your schedule an intimate relationship with Him.

And it's here today and it's going to be wonderful tomorrow. We look at this little glimpse Jesus gives us in heaven. And what we see is an environment where we are even more intimate with God and other people than we ever achieved on the earth.

Isn't that a beautiful thing to think about? Yeah. You see, good sex is okay. I mean, it's great. But it's not just good sex that makes an intimate marriage, is it?

When I get to heaven, I suspect there will be no sex. That's God's plan. I know I'm going to have a very good friend in heaven.

[16:58] Her name's Mary Ellen. In heaven, there are no, there's no ownership. Remember that song by John Lennon called, what was it called?

Imagine. Imagine. You know, there's no, no nations, no fighting, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. He also said no God. But that's not heaven. But heaven is kind of like imagine.

Not going to be any wars. Not going to be any, oh, who am I going to vote for on Tuesday? I don't have a good choice. I don't like any of these people. It's, you know, all that stuff's gone. We don't need to have sexual exclusivity. It's going to be open, loving relationship. Intimacy. intimacy. What a beautiful glimpse God has given for what awaits us. So we come back now to the end of this sermon. This retreat has been about intimacy.

[18:01] On Friday night, we talked about Zacchaeus coming out of the tree. And we realized we're all up a tree without a paddle. Wait a minute. That's wrong.

Okay, so we're all up in a tree. And our process of life is coming out of the tree and falling into the arms of Jesus. Zacchaeus, when he realized Jesus was for him, did some things, didn't he? Changed his life. What we call today repenting, which means turning 180 degrees around. He went from crook to honest man.

He repented of that which held him down. We need the same thing. Even after we believe, we are all the time plagued by a sinful way of life.

As I mentioned, it may not be bumping off a 7-Eleven store. But it may be sin of the mind. It may be a lingering sin which just crouches at the door and we give in to it.

[19:09] Part of realizing that Jesus loves us so much is being able to give that up, to repent. And by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit to start going down the straight road rather than the crooked.

So that's what we learned about Friday night. Once that happens, we move into what we talked about yesterday morning, intimacy through God's word and through God's table.

Jesus, the word, brings us into the word written which converts our hearts, moves us into God's way.

The table is a feeding. When Zacchaeus came down from the tree, what did he do? Ate. He ate with Jesus. We eat with Jesus at the table.

And those two areas, word and sacrament, bring us into intimacy with God. So that's where we are today. Revelation 3.20 is a memorization verse.

[20:19] Jesus says, Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and he with me.

Wow! That's you. That's me. He goes, and we say, I'd know that knock anywhere.

That's Jesus. Come on in! That's my prayer for you this day. Let us pray. Lord God, this is all mysterious. We don't understand any of it except we do understand you you love us in spite of ourselves.

We realize intimacy for you is knowing us as we are and as we can be and loving us through it.

Come, live in our lives, Lord Jesus.

Amen. And I will let you turn off the magic sound machine.