

## **Will Each Generation Know and Value Love?**

Fellow embodiments of God's love, will each generation know and value love? All Saints Sunday is indeed a time for the intermingling of our grief and gratitude as we remember loved ones who have died – in the past year and further back in our lifetimes.

We find ourselves gathered in this beloved building, built and loved by our ancestors in faith on land with which Wahpekute Dakota people and many other First Nations peoples have related for millennia before us.

Let us pray. God, as we seek to bring forward our best at this time – through the ministries of our church and as we look toward Election Day; grant us the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

By calling saints to mind today, we invite them to be present with us. We open doors to remembering how they have influenced us and hoping that their best ways of influencing us will be embodied through our lives.

If you're comfortable doing so, I invite you to close your eyes for an extended moment as bring to mind and heart one or two particular beloved saints of your lives whom you are missing today. As you begin to see their particular smile, the way they furrowed their brow in concentration, the way they gestured with their hands, or the way they approached for a hug or a kiss on the cheek; ask yourself: what quality of this person most influenced me? In what purpose or endeavor did they engage and inspire me? And wonder, will you invest yourself in acting in those loving ways in this world? Patterning some aspect of your life after that saint is one very true way of participating with them in everlasting life.

Perhaps continuing to keep your eyes closed, hear again excerpted words from the psalmist. And let the goodness of your saint flow through the psalmist's faithful words.

And since God is Love, as I am wont to do, we will substitute in the word Love for God. Hear these words flow through the saints of your lives to you:

*“I will extol you, my God [my Love] and Ruler,  
and bless your name forever and ever.*

*Every day I will bless you  
and praise your name forever and ever.*

*One generation shall laud your works to another  
and shall declare your mighty acts.*

*They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness,  
and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.*

*[Love] is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.*

*[Love] is near to all who call,  
to all who call on Love in truth.*

*My mouth will speak the praise of [Love],  
and all flesh will bless [Love]’s holy name forever and ever.”*

If you’ve had your eyes closed, you may choose to open them again. Friends, let’s let God’s all-encompassing love flow through our memories of the saints of our lives today - even as we continue in our lives of discipleship.

Hear again the introductory words of that prophetic reading for today as it speaks to us as well as we remember our saints. Mary Maren read these words: The prophet spoke to the remnant residents of Jerusalem who were left behind after the Babylonian army deported Judean leaders and skilled laborers to exile in Mesopotamia. Haggai hears the voice of God encouraging listeners to know that some new glory (a new manifestation of Love) in their worshipping community - their congregation - will somehow be even greater than the older, ancient manifestations.

So hear these excerpted words to us as we intend to move forward in ministry as a congregation and move forward in our society. A few words from the prophet:

*“Who is there left among you who saw this Temple in its former glory? And how does it look to you now?... Courage, all you people... To work! I am with you... my Spirit remains among you. Don’t be afraid! The new glory of this Temple is going to surpass the old... and in this place I will give peace...”*

What words of strength and encouragement from the prophet for us as we do the collaborative work of being a congregation – standing on strong shoulders from our individual private lives and the strong shoulders of our collective congregation who have gone before us! And what words of encouragement as we work collaboratively as a nation toward love and justice!

I want to share the deepest and most influential blessing I have ever received as we wonder today in a liminal space between the saints who have influenced us and how we might influence those among us now. I keep tucked away in my journal a card that my Grandpa Earl wrote to me for my eleventh birthday. (Some of you have tasted Grandpa Earl’s oatmeal, date, walnut, chocolate chip cookies, made by my sister in the present day.) Cancer took my grandpa away ten months after this eleven-year-old birthday card, so I think he knew it would be his last birthday card to me. As I’ve grown through thirty years of adolescence and young adulthood, I find that I draw his card out of its hiding place to read at times when I feel discouraged or tired. I look for wisdom and encouragement in the love of God that my saint, Grandpa Earl, so well embodied for me.

These are the words he wrote in cursive on the back of the birthday card:

*Dear Clare,*

*I love you very much because you are a sweet girl. You are growing up and getting to be an entertainer at the same time. Just keep that nice smile and you will sure make it through this life like a breeze. I know you work hard and that is great. Just thank God for all you have, as I think God for you being so nice to me. Again, I love you and God bless and keep you.*

*Your Grandpa*

*Earl*

Love (all-encompassing love) made it possible for Grandpa Earl to know who I was and to always see and encourage the best in me. Grandpa Earl has now gone from this Earth nearly 30 years, yet he reminds me daily that my heart and mind are strong and ever able to expand to let in new people and experiences. Grandpa Earl continues to help me to know and love myself while embracing others. Is that not what our saints do at their best?

For whom will you embody such love that it endures forever and ever? For whom will you be a model of demonstrating transparent love such that each and every generation will know and value love?

How will the saints whom you have brought to mind and heart today continue to influence you in your calling to invest yourself (your energy, skill and money) in the God-inspired work within our congregation and within this society?

The Love of God is the force toward greater love and justice. May we each live as though we will be someone else's saint someday – because Love is counting on us. Amen!

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Psalm 145: 1-8, 17-21, Haggai 2: 1-9