Connecting to Thrive

As we move into a time of reflection, we recognize the gift it is to be freely gathered for worship – on the live stream and on this land that has been loved by First Nations and others throughout time and where we are now weaving our way of community. I invite you to join me in a moment of prayer – closing your eyes if that helps to ground you in this moment.

Spirit of God, we trust your presence with us from long before our first breath, during this life, and long beyond our last breath – for we know that we are loved by you for all of eternity. Help us to perceive how we are all interconnected in you. We ask this as disciples of Jesus. Amen.

Fellow sojourners along the path of life, a question: on what date in the month of November does the Thanksgiving holiday fall each year? It is a trick question, because we know that the date of Thanksgiving shifts around in order to land on the fourth Thursday of the month. If I were to designate one day in November to set apart especially for giving thanks, it would be November 1st – All Saints Day.

To confuse matters a bit further, I suppose it is actually today – the first Sunday in November, the day on which we celebrate All Saints Day, that my soul cries out in gratitude all the beloved people with whom my path has already intersected and all whom I have yet to encounter. Why do I experience this day as one of thanksgiving? I believe in the depths of my being that we are each here on Earth to do as encouraged by the tagline we discerned for our congregation. We are here to connect, to grow, and to love. As a community of faith, on this sacred day, we pause together to reflect upon how those who have gone before us have taught us lessons about how to connect, grow, and love.

The saint of our lives continue to influence us to the extent that we welcome them. That is true of both the dead and saints who are still alive among us.

We do well to recognize that we do not need to welcome all the saints to have significant influence in our lives. While every living being bears the imprint of our Creator, we do not always behave as such. We can hold healthy boundaries between ourselves and those who have done us harm (whether they are dead or living). We get to choose the extent to which we continue to accept their influence.

Let's consider for a moment how those who have died continue to positively influence us. Do you find that a loved one visits you in your dreams while sleeping? Do you have vivid memories or interactions with them while awake?

Hear again how poet Jan Richardson describes the supportive movement of those who have gone beyond but who remain with us still. Richardson writes:

"[H]ow strong what stirs on the other side,
breathing with you and blessing you still,
forever bound to you but freeing you
into this living, into this world so much wider than you ever knew."

As we hold space today for those who have passed beyond the curtain of death, I invite us to consider how, in our sacred scriptures, angels serve as messengers from God. Whether our departed loved ones appear to us in nighttime dreams or in waking moments, I encourage us to think of them as angels, bringing us messages from the heart of God – perhaps messages that only they are uniquely capable of delivering to us.

My Grandmother Dorothy died just shy of my fourth birthday. We called her Grandma Dort. She was hard-working, gentle, and appreciative. We lived in the same small town, so she was part of the weekly rhythms of my life. Although my memories of her are fuzzy and patchy, she visited me in my dreams within months (perhaps weeks) after she died. In my dream, our family car pulled into their driveway. There sat Grandma Dort and Grandpa Earl at their usual post – in lawn chairs on the front patio.

When my sister and I hopped out of the car, they rose to greet us. As I ran toward Grandma Dort, she began to shrink – smaller and smaller as I approached – until, just as I reached her, she had disappeared.

What message did Grandma Dort bring to me in that dream? At the end of her life, she suffered with extreme pain in a time and space before home hospice pain management meds were readily available. She decided that she did not want her grandchildren to see her in such agony. And the family respected her wish. I didn't see her much during that last year of her life (when I was three). I think the message she brought in my dream was acknowledgement that she understood how her mysterious disappearance from my view toward the end of her life was a confusing loss for me.

And I think her message to me had another layer – one that held an invitation for me. She may have wanted to invite me to consider how, when I choose to withdraw my physical or emotional presence from people in my life, they will feel the loss of my presence (even if withheld with caring intention). So I wonder: will I accept Grandma Dort's invitation from beyond?

And I invite you to wonder this morning: **What message has one of the imperfect loving saints of your life been bringing to you?** Perhaps they have visited you in a dream while sleeping. Or perhaps they appear in your thoughts during waking hours. Is there a lesson they learned during their lifetime that they wish for you to understand in a new way? Might they be extending to you a vital invitation? And might they be ready to share with you an insight they did not find a way to share while living?

In part, this is a day of thanksgiving for the saints who have gone before us – those whose physical presence we continue to grieve in parts of our heart that are reserved for them. Yes, and… The Apostle Paul, through his letter to the first century church in Corinth, invites us to take an appreciative look around at the living saints with whom we surround ourselves.

Church can be a wonderful, sometimes messy, complex and beautiful context in which to grow.

Do you sometimes find that your closest family members and friends have pretty well made up their minds about your personality, gifts, foibles, and capacity to connect, grow and love? I find that to be a common experience – that we have made up our minds about the people closes to us. But with each new connection we create as a church (within our congregation and in collaboration with partners in our wider community), we find that we can grow and love in new ways.

Because our congregation's life and ministry is, by nature, very multi-faceted; we could not possibly thrive if we were all a foot taking action, a hand trying to help out, an eye carefully sensing and drinking people in, an ear pausing and listening carefully, a mouth speaking with clarity, or an elbow nudging the rest of us along.

I wonder: **Could we each take the way that we get to freely experiment with offering our skills, insight, and energy as part of our church's life back into our closest relationships – believing that, actually, we and our loved ones could continue to connect, grow, and love in deeper and fresh ways in those relationships as well?**

Let's practice here by being a whole, interconnected, appreciative, multi-sainted body of Christ – because Love is counting on us. Amen.

Rev. Clare Gromoll
St. Croix United Church (Bayport, MN)
November 2, 2025 | All Saints Sunday
"God of the Living: A Blessing," 1 Corinthians 12:4-22, 26-27