

*In the first year of Babylon's King Belshazzar, Daniel had a dream—a vision in his head as he lay on his bed. He wrote the dream down. Here is the beginning of the account: I am Daniel. In the vision I had during the night I saw the four winds of heaven churning the great sea. Four giant beasts emerged from the sea, each different from the others. Now this caused me, Daniel, to worry. My visions disturbed me greatly. So I went to one of the servants who was standing ready nearby. I asked him for the truth about all this. He spoke to me and explained to me the meaning of these things. "These four giant beasts are four kings that will rise up from the earth, but the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingship. They will hold the kingship securely forever and always." Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18*

*Sing to the Lord a new song; sing God's praise in the assembly of the faithful! Let Israel celebrate its maker; let Zion's children rejoice in their king! Let them praise God's name with dance; let them sing God's praise with the drum and lyre! Because the Lord is pleased with his people, God will beautify the poor with saving help. Let the faithful celebrate with glory; let them shout for joy on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to get revenge against the nations and punishment on the peoples, binding their rulers in chains and their officials in iron shackles, achieving the justice written against them. That will be an honor for all God's faithful people. Praise the Lord! Psalm 149*

*Jesus raised his eyes to his disciples and said: "Happy are you who are poor, because God's kingdom is yours. Happy are you who hunger now, because you will be satisfied. Happy are you who weep now, because you will laugh. Happy are you when people hate you, reject you, insult you, and condemn your name as evil because of the Human One. Rejoice when that happens! Leap for joy because you have a great reward in heaven. Their ancestors did the same things to the prophets. But how terrible for you who are rich, because you have already received your comfort. How terrible for you who have plenty now, because you will be hungry. How terrible for you who laugh now, because you will mourn and weep. How terrible for you when all speak well of you. Their ancestors did the same things to the false prophets. But I say to you who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other one as well. If someone takes your coat, don't withhold your shirt either. Give to everyone who asks and don't demand your things back from those who take them. Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you." Luke 6:20-31*

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

It is good to be together this morning on this holy day when the Church pauses to remember all the saints, those whose lives have shaped ours, whose love still lingers in our memory, and whose faith continues to ripple through time. On All Saints Sunday, we exist between heaven and earth. The air feels a little thinner today, as though the veil that separates us from those who have gone before has been gently lifted. This is one of those Sundays that reminds us what it means to be the Church, not just a congregation gathered in one place, but a communion that stretches far beyond what our eyes can see.

All Saints Day is one of the oldest feast days in the Christian year. From the earliest centuries, the Church gathered to remember those who had died for their faith, first the martyrs and later all faithful believers who had finished their earthly journey. By the ninth century, the observance had spread throughout the Church and was fixed on November 1, followed by All Souls on November 2, when prayers were offered for all the departed. Over time, the celebration came to include every person, known and unknown, whose life reflected the light of Christ. In the Protestant tradition, including Methodism, we keep All Saints Sunday as a day of remembrance and thanksgiving. We name the saints who have died in the past year, light candles or ring bells in their memory, and remember that we are part of a communion that stretches across time and place. The purpose is not just to mourn, but to give thanks for lives that have pointed us toward God's love and to affirm that in Christ, life is stronger than death. And John Wesley believed All Saints was one of the greatest celebrations in the life of the Church.

And yet, we do not only look backward today. This isn't a memorial service. We also look around. Because the saints were not made in calm or perfect times. They were people of faith in the middle of a wild and unpredictable world. That is where they lived, and that is where we live too. We honor them best not by naively idealizing them, but by joining them in that same calling: to live with courage and hope when the world feels uncertain, to find holiness right in the middle of the mess. Faith is not about escaping the noise of the world. It is about learning to listen for God's voice within it. The saints remind us that the world has always been unpredictable, but that God's promises have always held true.

There is something deeply human about the desire to make sense of the world, to name its wildness and understand its patterns. Daniel's vision gives voice to that longing. He dreams of the sea, vast and deep and untamed, and from it rises four great creatures unlike anything he has ever seen. The text says his spirit was troubled, his face pale. He does not understand what he is seeing, and honestly, can you blame him? Who would? He stands before

something bigger than himself, something mysterious and unsettling. Yet within that vision, God gives him a message of reassurance.

We can relate to Daniel's vision. The world feels wild sometimes, unpredictable, overwhelming, and even frightening. The beasts in Daniel's dream represent all the forces that twist human power into cruelty. They are the empires that build using suffering and enslavement, greed that feeds on the most vulnerable around us, and violence that rises whenever fear or difference takes hold. Yet even in the middle of that nightmare, Daniel hears a promise. "The holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom and possess it forever." The vision does not deny that evil is real. It simply insists that evil does not win. However loud the powers of destruction may roar, their time is limited. God's kingdom endures when empire falls, and all empires fall. That's the nature of humanity.

That is the heartbeat of Daniel's vision and the reason the saints did not lose heart. They lived through their own versions of those beasts—war, oppression, fear, injustice—and still they trusted that God was not done with the world. The world Daniel saw was one where kingdoms rise and fall, where pride turns violent, and where power consumes itself. But the promise he receives is that love and holiness outlast them all. Saints are those who cling to that promise. They know that faith is not pretending the world is perfect. It is daring to believe that God is still sovereign, even in the face of everything that says otherwise.

Psalms 149 gives us a glimpse of what that looks like. "Let them praise God's name with dancing. Let them sing praises with tambourine and lyre." This is a psalm full of movement and joy and noise. The faithful people of God, the saints, are noisy about it. They cry joyfully on their beds. They dance in the streets. Their worship is alive, embodied, full of energy. Praise, for them, is not what they do after life becomes peaceful. Praise is how they survive when life is not. Worship is not a retreat from reality; it is how they find strength to keep facing it.

The psalmist seems to understand that joy is not the absence of struggle, but the practice of hope. When we sing, we remember that the world's story does not end in fear or failure. Every "alleluia" is a declaration that God's love is stronger than death. Every act of worship reminds us who we are and whose we are, to be a bit cliché. The saints have always known this. They sang when they were free and when they were imprisoned, when they were safe and when they were afraid. Their song has carried through the centuries, sometimes in full-voiced choirs, sometimes in a single trembling voice, but always rising toward the same hope.

When Jesus looks out over the crowd in our Gospel for today, he does not bless the powerful, the comfortable, or the admired. That's crucial to the story. He blesses those who are poor, hungry, and grieving. He blesses those who choose mercy, who forgive enemies, who give without expecting repayment. This is Jesus' portrait of the saints, not people who escaped hardship, but people who met it with grace. "Happy are you who are poor," he says, "because God's kingdom is yours. Happy are you who weep now, because you will laugh." And then he tells them, "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you."

This is not just moral advice, though we should certainly hold it as such. It is a description of what God's kingdom looks like when it comes alive in human hearts. The saints are not superhuman; they are simply people who trust that mercy is stronger than revenge, generosity more lasting than greed, forgiveness more healing than anger. The world may call that naïve, but Jesus calls it blessed. And when we look at our own lives, we can see what that kind of faith looks like in practice. It looks like caring for someone who cannot repay us, doing something that is for someone's benefit and not ours. It looks like refusing to answer cruelty in the world with cruelty, an eye for an eye? That wasn't our principle or

Jesus', that was Babylon, another conquering empire. Sainly faith in action looks like loving this world enough to hope that it can still be redeemed.

When I think of the saints in my own life, that is what I see, not perfection but courage. People who loved when it was difficult. People who forgave when they had every reason not to. People who kept showing up with casseroles and phone calls and prayers when others had forgotten. Maybe someone like that comes to your mind too, a parent, a teacher, a neighbor, someone from this very congregation. Their faces, their laughter, their quiet prayers. They are the reason we are here. They are the ones who helped us believe that God's love really can take root in a wild world.

That is what we mean when we say in the Affirmation of Faith, "I believe in the communion of saints." It is not only a belief in life after death, though we do claim that promise. It is a belief that love never stops binding us together. When we read their names and ring the bell in a few minutes, we are not simply remembering them. We are recognizing that they still belong to us, and we to them. Because God's kingdom is not some distant reward. It is the reality that love never dies. The saints are not gone from us. They are gathered into the eternal life of God, and their faith still sustains ours.

Daniel saw a vision of the holy ones inheriting the kingdom. Jesus described that kingdom taking shape in mercy and compassion. The psalmist sang of joy that refuses to fade. Together these voices remind us that even when the world is wild, the saints show us how to trust the One who holds it all. Their lives are a reminder that faith is not about having control but about belonging to the God who does. The saints remind us that holiness is not about leaving the world behind, but about loving it deeply and faithfully, even in its brokenness.

The saints lived in every kind of world imaginable, war-torn and peaceful, divided and united, uncertain and hopeful. And through it all, they kept trusting God. They kept singing. They kept blessing. Their faith was not measured by their certainty, but by their love. And that same love continues to move through us. When we live with compassion, when we forgive someone who hurt us, when we choose hope in a seemingly heart and hopeless age, we are continuing their work. We are becoming, in our own time, the saints of God.

So as we remember them today, may we hear their invitation to live faithfully in this wild, unpredictable, yet beautiful world, to love more deeply than fear allows, to forgive with the same mercy we have received, to keep singing the song that holds the world together. For the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingdom, and we are part of them. Thanks be to God. Amen.