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First Presbyterian Church

November 3, 2025

Texts: Ecclesiastes 3:1–8, John 2:1–11

Today we observe **All Saints' Sunday**, a day set aside in many faith traditions to remember those who have gone before us in faith: the saints known and unknown, and to give thanks for the ways they have shaped our lives. Having a day set aside annually when we can collectively grieve losses and celebrate the lives of our saints is a healthy spiritual practice. And so, All Saint's Day is a time for grieving and acknowledging sorrow as a natural part of life.

The writer of Ecclesiastes reminds us that *“for everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven — a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.”*

All Saints' Sunday invites us to hold all those things together. To remember that grief and joy, sorrow and celebration, mourning and dancing, are not opposites — they are companions in the same journey.

Some of you know that my Mom died on October 9, and last Monday my husband Terry and I led her memorial service. I'd known for long time my Mom wanted us to lead the service (she and my Dad planned their memorial services over 20 years ago), but for years I wasn't sure I would be able to do it and shared that with my Mom. But Westminster Presbyterian church, my mom's church (she was the longest tenured member), is currently without a minister. So, duty called.

As I prepared my remarks, I struggled with where to begin. Where does one even begin to talk about their mother? So, I decided to start with one word, and that word was gratitude. Grateful sums up my feelings since October 9, and that has surprised me. I would have expected sorrow or sadness – which I have felt – but mostly, I have felt gratitude; a deep gratitude for her life, for being my mom, for her love, and for everything she instilled in me and taught me.. And gratitude, I’ve come to see, in a way I never had before, how grief and gratitude can hold hands. How they are two poles of the same truth.

“The work of the mature person,” Francis Weller writes, “is to carry grief in one hand and gratitude in the other and to be stretched large by them.”

Grief reminds us how much we’ve loved, and gratitude reminds us that a person’s life continues to offer beauty and meaning.

My experience the past 3 weeks has helped me see even more clearly how closely grief and gratitude are intertwined, and how much All Saints’ Sunday gives us permission to feel both.

Because All Saints isn’t only about remembering losses; it’s also about giving thanks — for the ways God’s love shines through the people we’ve loved and the saints who’ve loved us into being.

And so, on this All Saint’s Sunday, let us do more than trot out our grief. Let us also say “thank you to God, for the ways God worked in and through our saints who loved and shaped us.

Which brings us to today’s Gospel story — the wedding at Cana.

Of all the places Jesus could have chosen to begin his ministry — a pulpit, a synagogue, a mountaintop — he begins at a party. A wedding feast. The wine runs out, and after some encouragement from his mother, Jesus turns water into wine — not just a little, but an overflowing abundance.

The steward tastes it and says, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the cheap wine after the guests have drunk freely. But you have kept the good wine until now!”

Now of all the miracles Jesus could perform: bringing a little girl back to life, stopping a woman from bleeding; feeding 5000 people; or bringing sight to a blind man; why would John put this one first? Because John wants us to know, first and foremost, that God loves us more than we could ever imagine; an overflowing abundance of love. AND he wants us to open our eyes and see the extravagant abundance of things all around us—of family gatherings, of the love received from our saints, And To give witness to that love in what we say and do, and to be grateful for it. As you light your candles this morning, say thank you to your saint and to God for placing your saint in your life.

Friends, surely this wedding story is a sign that God says yes to love and joy, and that God has created us for celebrations and laughter. After all, John could have had Jesus begin his work in the temple with a solemn sermon, but instead he chose a party – a celebration of life, a sign that God wants us to enjoy our lives, to live fully, and to love the gift of life itself.

But this story is a sign of something more, too. For just as surely as God is with us when the gift of life is fully celebrated, God is with us when one’s life comes to an

end. Our story opens, “On the third day . . .” Where have we heard that before? “On the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father almighty . . .”

This story looks forward to the resurrection and to the promise that death doesn’t have the final word. Instead, the abundant, overflowing love of God has the final word, and eternal life prevails. This is the promise of the resurrection. God’s promise that life is stronger than death, that love is greater than hate, that mercy overcomes judgment, and that all the sufferings and difficulties of this life are transient – real and palpable and painful, for sure, but they do not have the last word. Instead, the life changing message that the God who created us loves our saints, loves us, and loves us too much to leave us alone has the final word.

Our brief statement of faith in the Presbyterian Church says it this way: “In life and in death we belong to God.” We belong to God in our lives, and now our saints belong to God in their deaths. This is the promise and beauty of the resurrection.

I think of my mom among those saints — and I imagine many of you are thinking of yours. Each of them, in their own way, showed us what love looks like, and left us a glimpse of God’s joy.

So today, as we name and remember our saints, may we give thanks for their lives. May we honor them by living with the same fullness and joy they taught us. And may we trust in the promise that, because of the resurrection, love never ends.

Amen.