

Sunday after All Saints Day—Year B
Isaiah 25:6-9
Psalm 24
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44

Today is **our celebration** of the **Feast of All Saints**. While the **actual day is November 1st**, the **Church** allows us to **transfer our celebration to the Sunday following**.

There are always the **big saints** that we think about—the **St. Francis's** or **Julian's of Norwich** or **Hildegard's** or **Oscar Romero's** or **Richard Hooker's**—*any other favorites?* We all have **saints** that we are **partial to**, those **exemplars of the faith** that **show us boldly** what **following in the way of Jesus** looks like.

But lately, I've been thinking much more about **our saints closer to home**. I spend a fair amount of time in our **St. Luke's Memorial Garden**, and that's been especially true this year. **We've plotted it and marked it and mapped it with a drone**. There's always the time spent **preparing a grave** when we are **about to inter someone's ashes**. There's the **ritual itself** when we **lay a brother or sister to rest in the womb of the earth**. And more recently, there has been the **work of a group** that has been **dreaming** about how to make the **space around the Garden more beautiful and peaceful** with **benches and plantings**. You'll be hearing more about this project in the months ahead. And I know **I'm not the only one** who finds their way to that space.

Our **Memorial Garden is a thin place**, a place where **the veil between this world and the next is very, very thin**, and you **know it's a thin place** because whenever *children* are **present**, they are **drawn to run the spiral**. *They know* it's a **special place**. For me, it's an **icon**. **Icons** have a way of **drawing you into their gaze and into a conversation with God**. Our **Memorial Garden is an icon of our St. Luke's communion of saints**. It **draws us through the veil into that place where heaven and earth meet**, and we **commune with the saints**. We **hear their voices whisper inspiration**; we **feel their encouragement of our spirits**; we **sense their compassion in our hearts**.

As I think about those who rest in our **Memorial Garden**, I think about **all the gifts** that they **brought to this life** and that they *continue* to **bestow with such abundance**. As I go through this **litany of qualities**, let **faces rise up before you**, both **those of the St. Luke's community and those particular to your own life who have gone before**.

Think about their **wisdom**, or their **sense of adventure**, *especially* with regards to **trying new things**, or their **capacity to be a thorn in our flesh** when it comes to **matters of justice**.

Recall their commitment to placing children at the center of our spiritual life, or their **vision of our kinship with and responsibility to the global community**.

Remember how they **witnessed to the importance of our ancestors**, the **necessity of play** (even golf), the **delight of friendship**, the **gift of love**.

Our saints remind us that **lives gone far too soon from this earth shine bright throughout eternity** having made an **imprint on our hearts that lasts forever**. They **call us to live life fully**, to **feast sumptuously and to keep expanding the table** and to **drink deep of joy**.

There are our **favorite curmudgeons**, those who **challenged us every step of the way with their questions, their standards, their deep sense of history and tradition**, and who **revealed to us our own blind spots** all along the way—they're **still whispering in our ear often making us smile when they bring us up short**.

So many of our **St. Luke's saints** hold before us a **deep and abiding love of the earth** and **invite us to love creation and Creator alike**.

Others show us how to **weave ties of kinship** with **those we might otherwise call strangers, particularly the most vulnerable in this world**.

So many **call us to service** in the **myriad of ways** that *they lived* that **service in their earthly lives**.

They **call us to take in beauty**, to **be wide-eyed and curious**, to **live lives full of wonder**, to **be content with mystery**.

They **remind us** that **our failures, our sins, our brokenness** are *never* the **final word**—from **their place of wholeness in eternity** they **call us to shed all that hinders us, including our guilt and our shame**; they **bid us to fall into the arms of our Lord** who **loves us beyond all measure, letting Jesus' love transform us ever more deeply into his likeness**.

They **call us to make provision for those who will come after us**, that *they, too*, may **have a place to come where they may touch eternity**.

There are **so many saints**—those who **made a mark on us along the way, an imprint on our soul, that shapes us and informs us still**.

That's the thing about the **saints**, they are **all around us, a great cloud of witnesses**.

Take a deep breath. Let **those who've gone before rise up in your consciousness**. Think about **the witness of their life on earth and the gifts they continue to offer you across eternity**. (*pause*)

They are here; they are among us; they are present; and the communion we share with them is stronger than death. It's *not* that **they're in eternity, and we're not**. *Our faith holds that our eternal life begins, not at our death, but at our baptism.* We **share eternity, right now, with all the saints**.

And from the **strength of our communion with them**, we will **find our way through all the twists and turns and challenges that stretch before us**. They **speak still—guiding us, calling us, loving us, encouraging us**. They will **continue to show us what it means to follow Jesus, if we let them**. It's **much easier to navigate this world walking with them than it is to go it alone**. We're **not alone, ever**.

Breathe deep of that glorious truth today and taste that sweet communion that spans the realms and won't ever let us go. Amen.

The Rev. Cynthia K. R. Banks
St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Boone, NC
November 7, 2021