



## 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Council on Christian Unity

### Worship Resources

*Prepared by Ron Allen and Linda McKiernan-Allen*

#### **11. All Saints Day**

**Sunday, November 1, 2010**

#### **Resources for Today**

- Focus for Today
- Call to Worship
- Opening Prayer
- Significant Quote
- Responsive Reading
- Invitation to the Table
- Notes for Preaching Based on the Revised Common Lectionary
- Closing Prayer
- Possible Hymns and Songs
- The Writers

[Material marked with an asterisk \* was developed by Linda McKiernan-Allen and Ron Allen]

#### **Focus for Today\***

During much of its history, the Council on Christian Unity has largely attempted to foster cooperation among Christians and churches who share common space: through councils of churches, through intense dialogue with particular churches (such as the Roman Catholic Church), through the mutual rediscovery of the three streams of the Stone-Campbell movement, through finding common mission with denominations and movements beyond the ecumenical councils, and through encouraging the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to become a truly multicultural and inclusive denomination.

All Saints Day is a reminder that the unity of the church is not only across space (among Christians who are alive now) but is also across time. All Saints Day reminds the church that we are orphans in our own historical moment, but that we are part of a great tradition that began with Sarai and Abram (or even with Eve and Adam), was confirmed through Jesus Christ, and into which we are baptized. On All Saints Day we remember we are united with the Saints of previous traditions.

In some deep way, all those who have gone before are present with us and we are present with them. In the language of "To the Hebrews," *'We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses'* (Hebrews 12:1). Different theological and philosophical movements explain this

presence in different ways, but all explanations emphasize we are part of a living community which spans the ages and continues into the coming Realm of God.

All Saints Day is a relatively new emphasis to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). In congregations of the Christian Church preachers nearly always make the point that in the Bible, a saint is not a ceramic figure on a pedestal under a reverent light. The English word “saint” renders Greek and Hebrew words for “holy one.” The words for “holy” in both Hebrew and Greek mean “to be set apart.” Saints are set apart to live according to God’s purposes. In the biblical period (spanning 2,500 years) Israel is called a holy community (e.g. Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 7:6; Ezra 8:28; Psalm 16:3 Jeremiah 2:3). In the Gospels and Letters, the English word “saints” translates the Greek for “holy ones” and usually refers to all in the congregation (e.g. Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1). From this perspective, all who seek to be faithful are saints.

Given the contemporary concern of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to become a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world, and the call to the Disciples to become a multicultural and inclusive church, we especially emphasize the communion of saints as a community embracing churches and individuals from all races, cultures, languages, nations, and peoples.

On All Saints Day many congregations read the names of members who died in the previous year. The reading is sometimes accompanied by the tolling of a bell, the lighting of a candle, placing of a flower on the Table, or showing a picture of the deceased. To demonstrate the broader communion of saints, the congregation might add the names (with brief biographical statements and pictures or paintings) of Christian leaders from other times and places. Such additions could include not only leaders important to the formation of the Disciples of Christ or congregation, but could include some Christians from churches and movements quite different from our own.

In some theological circles, saints (in the broadest sense) are not limited to Christians. A saint can be anyone who embodies core qualities of love, peace, justice, and concern for all. A congregation that shares this broader conception might recognize saints from outside the Christian tradition. In this way, the church would be a sign of the coming eschatological unity.

### **Call to Worship\***

One: We remember Jesus calling together disciples and the multitude, long ago.

Many: Jesus taught, and healed and reached out to many, saying “blessed are. . .”

One: Jesus blessed the poor, those who mourn, the peacemakers

Many: So today we celebrate the saints.

One: As we worship, we remember the blessed.

Many: As we worship, we give thanks for God’s blessing on us and on all God’s saints

All: Alleluia!

## Opening Prayer\*

We give thanks to you, Lord God, for all those who have gone before us, leading in Jesus' Way. Today as we worship you, draw us to you through the stories and remembrance of the saints. Challenge us to welcome the light of their lives. Strengthen us to hear your blessing for each of us and for this community of faith, that we might continue the witness of "the holy ones." Let our lives become a living "alleluia", through the risen Christ we pray, AMEN

## Significant Quote

Joseph R. Jeter, Jr. [in many ways a chaplain to the entire Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)], authored a collection of 141 meditations on the sacred meal that should be on every minister's desk. Here is the meditation, "Re/membering" that gave the collection its title. It brings forward the trans-generational, trans-cultural dimensions of All Saints Day.

"The word 'remember' is central to the celebration of Holy Communion. Some form of the word is carved into communion tables around the world and it is found in every liturgy for those tables. Some time ago, however, I heard a preacher (Rita Nakashima Brock) say, 'The opposite of remember is not forget; the opposite of remember is dismember.' I was disoriented by that assertion and thought about it for a long time. Certainly one could make the case that remembering and forgetting are opposites. However, 'the opposite of remember is dismember' opens a new door of understanding for us. When intending this meaning of the word, I have chosen to write 're/member' with a slash, allowing the more common meaning to maintain its own integrity."

"Coming back to the table together in this light is an act of re/membering of being put back together, of being made right. The Greeks had a word, *apokatastasis*, which hints at this, that eventually everything will be made right, that all of creation, now hopelessly sundered and fractious, will be restored to peace and harmony."

"Our gathering here is an anticipation of that time. When the centrifugal force of life in this world threatens to dismember us, it is here that we remember Jesus and are re/membered by him into the living Body of Christ. So our partaking is not only, as we perhaps thought, a solitary act; it is also an act of community-building. And what a community it is! God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the ones on either side of you, everyone gathered here today, all those gathered about the table of Jesus Christ everywhere in the world, all those who have ever partaken of the Supper and all those who ever will . . . are re/membered, are ONE in this moment. If we believed and acted upon this utterly true statement of faith, what a difference it would make in the world."

"There are so many. It will take a little while to serve everyone. Bu we have time. As we come to the table this morning, I invite you to think of someone you would like to have with us at the table today; it may be someone who is a long way away from us today, someone who has gone on before, someone you have never met but would like to meet, someone who has not even been born yet. Name them in your heart, and invite them to come and be part of this community today. For my part, I remember the name of Bill Shelly. Come. Let us remember. Come. Let us be re/membered as the people of God. Jesus is waiting to put us back together again."

## Other Liturgical Material

This litany is based on Revelation 14:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14; 1 Corinthians 15:35, 37, 43, 53; 2 Corinthians 5:1; John 14:2, 18, 26–7, 11:25–26; and Wisdom of Solomon 2:23–3:5. It is revised from a liturgy in *Flames of the Spirit* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1985) edited by Ruth C. Duck and found online at <http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/totenfest.pdf>

### A Litany and Prayers of Remembrance

One: Blessed are the dead who from now on die in Christ.

People: They will rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.

One: We do not want you to be uninformed about those who have died,

People: So that you may not grieve as others who have no hope.

One: For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again,

People: Even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

One: But someone will ask “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?”

People: When you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed.

One: But God gives a body as God has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

People: It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.

One: For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality.

People: For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

One: Jesus said “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. I go to prepare a place for you.

People: I will not leave you orphaned. I am coming to you.

One: The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I said to you.

People: Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

One: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,

People: “And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”

One: For God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of God's own eternity.

People: The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God and no torment will ever touch them.

One: "They are at peace and their hope is full of immortality"

People: "Because God tested them and found them worthy." Amen.

### **Invitation to the Table**

As we gather around the Lord's Table this morning, we're reminded of the table which stretches not only around the world, but through time. Here, we are surrounded by "so great a cloud of witnesses", the saints of all time and space. (If you have invited the congregation to write the names of their saints, invite them to offer them aloud ahead of this prayer, or randomly choose some from the offering trays to read aloud, if they are already at the table)

So we turn to a prayer written by Cranmer for the *1549 Prayer Book*:

"ALMIGHTIE God, which haste knitte together thy electe in one Communion and felowship, in the mysticall body of thy sonne Christe our Lord; graunt us grace so to folow thy holy Saynctes in all virtues, and godly living, that we maye come to those inspeakeable joyes, whiche thou hast prepared for all them that unfaynedly love thee; through Jesus Christe."

*Today, we would update the spelling, but still find it's an appropriate prayer as we come to the Lord's Table:*

Almighty God, you've knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your son, Christ our Lord. So grant us grace to follow the holy Saints in virtuous and godly living, that we may come to the true joy you prepare for all who completely love you, through Jesus Christ."

### **Notes for Preaching (based on the readings in the Revised Common Lectionary for November 1, 2010)**

#### Luke 6:20-31

Because Luke 6:27-31 brings forward enough issues for a sermon on just that passage, we focus on Luke 6:20-26, the Lukan beatitudes and woes.

For the last time in this series, we note that for Luke world history is divided into two parts—the present fallen world that distorts God's purposes and the coming new world (the Realm of God) In which all things will take place according to God's purposes. Jesus is God's representative in announce that the time of the transition from the old to the Realm is already underway in Jesus's own ministry but will not be complete and final until the second coming. In the meantime, the church is to witness to the Realm, to embody the life of the Realm in the life of the church, and to invite others into the community of the Realm (the church).

The Realm will finally and fully come with an apocalypse The Gospel text for today is directly dependent upon the end-time theology just described. Those who will be gathered into the Realm are “blessed.” In this context, to be blessed is not simply to be happy or fortunate but is to know that one is included in the community of the Realm. Such knowledge makes it possible to endure the difficulties of the present.

The people over whom God speaks “Woe” are not merely sad but are those who are condemned because of unfaithfulness. The content of the woe is divine end-time (apocalyptic) judgment.

Note that Luke 6:20-49 (the sermon on the plain) is directed to the disciples (Luke 6:20), that is, to those who participate in the community of the Realm. For Luke the disciples refer not only to those who followed Jesus during his life time but to those gathered into the church in Acts. Furthermore, Luke intends for his congregation to pay attention to the teaching directed to the disciples.

Luke 6:20-31 does not specifically use the language of sainthood. The church, however, has understood disciples whose lives manifest the qualities of the beatitudes to be saints in the inclusive sense discussed in the Focus for Today (Luke 6:20-23).

At one level, poverty, hunger, and weeping are characteristics of the old age that distort God’s purposes. (The weeping here is not sorrow in general but refers to those who weep because of the brokenness of the old age and its distance from God’s purposes). Scholars almost universally emphasize that Luke has actual physical conditions in mind: poverty, hunger, and sorrow. When the Realm comes, God will replace these with abundance, food, and laughter.

The poor and the hungry are not blessed because they are poor and hungry. Those are wretched states of being. They are blessed because they have a place in the Realm.

At another level, as already noted, the Lukan beatitudes are spoken to the disciples (Luke 6:20). “Blessed are *you* who are poor . . . Blessed are *you* who are hungry now . . . Blessed are *you* who weep now.” The disciples and the church contain the poor and hungry (e.g. Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-12; 12:49-56; Acts 2:37-42; 4:32-37; 6:1-6). The disciples are self-evidently in view in Luke 6:22-23, “Blessed are *you* when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.” Luke 6:23-23 refers both to tensions between the Lukan congregation and the synagogue and also between the congregation and some Roman authorities.

The congregation can take heart from the persecutions because previous generations persecuted the prophets (see Acts 7:52; Isaiah 30:9-11; 63:10; Jeremiah 5:30-31; etc.) The fact of persecution is an index of the faithfulness of the congregation’s witness to the realm. The rulers of the old age entrench themselves, seeking to resist the coming of the Realm and its witnesses. They attempt to turn back the Realm by persecuting its witnesses and causing them to stop witnessing.

Luke, then, has in mind the poverty, hunger, sorrow, and persecution that result from following Jesus. The disciples in the Gospel of Luke and the church in the Book of Acts experience similar

conditions as a result of their witness to the Realm. Luke wants the faithful to continue in their faithfulness, even in the face of deprivation and conflict, so that they will be a part of the final Realm. At that time, they will be fully in the Realm. They will be full. They will laugh. They will rejoice.

From the point of view of All Saints Day, Luke 6:20-23 describes saints, describing them as faithful witnesses.

Luke 6:24-26 is the sober opposite. The term “Woe” makes it clear that eschatological condemnation is ahead. Those who have been wealthy now have already received their consolation. Those who are full now will be hungry. Those who laugh now will weep the tears of discovering they are forever condemned. Those who have enjoyed high social status now will fall under judgment. Two texts are examples of many: Luke passes a harsh judgment on the rich barn builder and later, Luke describes the rich person who denied real food to Lazarus (Luke 12:13-21; Luke 16:19-31).

One effect of the Lukan beatitudes is to push readers toward making a choice: Do we want to be blessed or cursed? To be blessed, we need to respond positively to Jesus’s invitation to repent and to join the movement towards the Realm of God. We need to witness to the Realm of God. We need to endure the poverty, hunger, sorrow, and persecution that result from faithful witness. If we do not respond positively to the Realm, we will be cursed, and experience eschatological woe.

On the basis of this one text, many Christians interpret the coming of the Realm as a simple categorical reversal: the poor receive the Realm while the wealthy are condemned. Indeed, it would be easy to think Luke regards the wealthy as categorically evil and denied participation in the Realm.

However, people need material resources (such as food, clothing, shelter, funds) to live. The poor, the hungry, the weeping and the persecuted need such resources to be fully present to the Realm now and in the future. As the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts unfold, Luke makes it clear that God uses the resources of the wealthy to sustain the poor and the hungry, and to maintain a community that supports the sorrowful and the persecuted. The classic texts in Acts that depict this process in action are Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-37. Those who had material resources sold their resources and placed them in the service of the community so that “there was not a needy person among them” (Acts 4:34). This is not surprising since the church is to be a community of the Realm. This sharing is not an act of charity. It is an expression of solidarity.

From the perspective of the Lukan beatitudes, the sharing of material resources on the part of those who have them (including the wealthy) is a means God uses to *bless* the poor and the hungry in the present.

For Luke, material resources are not evil in and of themselves. They are necessary for existence. The question is whether those who have material resources use them to support the values and powers of the old age or whether they those who control material resources use them in the

service of the Realm, especially in the service of the community of the Realm. The texts in the gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts that condemn the wealthy are pastoral warnings. In essence, they say to the wealthy, “You will end up like the barn builder or the rich person who denied food to Lazarus unless you use your material resources to witness to the Realm. If you repent of your greed and become an instrument of God’s providence, then, like Zacchaeus, you will have a place in the Realm.”

From the perspective of All Saints Day, those who have material resources and share them in solidarity with those who do not are also saintly. They are instruments of God’s providence.

[For a fuller discussion, see “Preaching on Poverty, Abundance, and the Use of Material Resources in Luke-Acts” in Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching Luke-Acts*. Preaching Classic Texts (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), pp. 123-140].

### **Closing Prayer\***

God you have gathered us in this place,  
filled us with remembrance and thanksgiving,  
and inspired us to live as your saints.  
Send us from this place filled with your Spirit,  
strengthened for our work,  
and eager to celebrate the blessings  
which you pour upon us and upon all your children.  
Send us out as saints to a world dying for Good News. AMEN

### **Possible Hymns and Songs**

(Numbers in parenthesis are from the Chalice Hymnal)

“Rejoice in God’s Saints” (476)  
“Pues Si Vivimos ;(When We are Living)” (536)  
“For All the Saints” (637)  
“ Give Thanks for Life” (649)  
“When All is Ended” (703)

### **Additional Resources\***

Research the ”Saints” who gathered the congregation. Find those in the congregation who are connected to these saints and invite them to participate in remembering the early congregational leaders. If you have persons able to prepare a song, mime, dance, or skit about them, offer it as a Call to Worship, or perform it as part of the morning sermon. Construct life-size figures of these saints and carry them in a festive opening procession, positioning them around the sanctuary as a “cloud of witnesses.” Have them lead the congregation out into the world after the benediction.

Consider traditions other than your own. In Mexico, the “Days of the Dead” are celebrated from October 31 to November 2. Marigolds are considered the flower of the dead for this remembrance. Candles are placed in the windows of homes to guide the souls of the dead, and an empty place is set at the dinner table. Remember, too, that many Asian cultures revere the graves of relatives, and celebrate religious rituals at the gravesites.

Remember new life. Some churches add the reading of the names of those who have been born in the same time period, to recall that, even as those we love die, so new life enters the church community. (Ideas from <http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/totenfest.pdf> )

During the sermon ask everyone to name saints from their own lives. Give each person a piece of paper and allow a minute of silence for each one to write down the name of one or two special “saints” in their lives for whom they wish to give God special thanks this day. The paper will then be placed on the offering plate when the offering is taken.

### **The Writers**

Linda is Transitional Minister of West Street Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Tipton, Indiana. She writes regularly for the *Journal of Worship Resources* and has edited several volumes of worship resources, including *Celebrating Covenant* (Chalice Press).

Ron teaches preaching and Gospels and Letters at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. One of his books—just published—is designed to help Sunday School classes, Bible study groups, and individuals explore the range of what Christians believe about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, and God’s purposes in the world: *A Faith of Your Own: Naming What You Really Believe*. In addition to being short and inexpensive, this volume includes questions for discussion at the end of each chapter.