

Christ Church, Ithaca  
All Saints Sunday  
November 6, 2011

### Sermon for All Saints' Sunday

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen. (adapted from Psalm 19:14)

Service was supposed to go back to normal today. Stewardship season has ended. We've gone back to using Rite II from the prayer book after you all graciously allowed me to share some of the Lutheran traditions last week in our Reformation Day service. Father Kevin is back in his role as presider. And there is, thankfully, no snow on the ground.

So why is the font still out—placed here in the center aisle, placed in the way of our processions? This is a beautiful font. The intricately carved wood serves as a reminder of the history of this parish since the font is the only remaining piece of furniture from the former wooden structure of Christ Church down the road.

What history of the church this font has seen! From the days of Ithaca Chapel through the transition to our own rector and vestry and through to our present day ministries, this font has stood as a witness to the promises of God in our midst. At every baptism in this parish, we have stood around this font to celebrate one of the happiest days of our lives.

I have a picture of my own baptism that normally stays tucked in my Bible. Together with our pastors and supported by the church community, my parents have brought me to the font on August 2, 1987. I was one hundred days old. My parents are absolutely beaming in this picture—probably still one of the happiest days of their lives. You can double check that with my mother at the 10:30 service, just to be sure. My parents are so happy. An occasion so momentous that they found it important enough to take pictures, get them developed, and twenty four years later still be able to find the picture. An occasion so momentous, yet I remember none of it.

We established during last week's children's sermon that very few of us actually remember the day of our baptism and you can bet that this seminarian includes herself in that number. How then can it be that one of the happiest days of my parents' lives—what is THE most important day in my Christian life—How can

this baptismal event we participate in shape my life, shape your life when we don't remember the actual event?

Our readings for today help to shed some light on this question. There are a number of people who shy away from the book of Revelation whenever it is assigned in the lectionary because of the theological harm that can and has been done through its misinterpretation. But the primary goal of apocalyptic texts and today's first reading is to comfort those who are oppressed and not to scare them.

“Who are these robed in white and where have they come from?” Who are these people who stand around the throne of God, witnessing to the faith they know to be true? Come together in spite of all their many differences of nationalities and languages, these people declare what they know to be true about God. “Salvation belongs to our God, and to the Lamb.” We have come through the great ordeal and we know that we did not do it on our own. The God who led the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt into the promised land, the God who sent Christ Jesus to lead us from the bondage of sin into everlasting life, leads these people robed in white out of the great ordeal and into the reign of God.

The stains on their robes, all of the things they have done and born witness to that make them unworthy to receive such grace are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. We sometimes have a tendency, you and me, to hang on to such transgressions, to believe that because of some prior sin or misdeed we are unwelcome in this place, at the communion rail, or in the kingdom of God. Does this sound familiar to you? Have you placed yourself in this category?

Today's readings bring good news to you, people of God! Left to our own devices, we are unworthy. But salvation does not belong to us. “Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb!” In the waters of baptism, we are set free from our sin and raised to the new life of grace. Our own works will not save us. But the promises of God made in baptism sustain us, they reconcile our lives, and they call us to love God and our neighbor.

We believe this word of grace. We bear witness to its truth at every baptism. Because we know that God has acted in this saving way in the past, because we believe that God acts in this saving way in the present, we can trust with full hope and assurance that God will continue to act in this saving way for the future.

We do not have to remember the actual event of our own baptism. These people robed in white bear witness for us to this word of truth. They are the saints of

every time and place. They are the ones called and chosen by God to bring news of this saving grace to our world. They are the ones who have been sanctified and made clean in the blood of the Lamb.

In the waters of baptism, we are claimed as children of God. We are added to this “great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.” Each and every one of us is enfolded into the kingdom of God.

The water in this font reminds us of God’s saving action through which we are joined to all the saints in light. This particular font reminds us of the witness of the saints of this parish, the people who have been our mentors in the faith. It reminds us of the knowledge they had of God’s love acting in their lives.

And so as you come forward for communion, I invite you again this week: Dip your hand into the waters of this font; recall the picture of those who stood around the font with you at your baptism / when you stood around the font for someone else’s baptism; reacquaint yourselves with the witness of the saints of this parish; trace the sign of the cross on your body; come again to know what these saints know—“Salvation belongs to our God and to the Lamb.” Then come to the table. Come and join with all the company of heaven. Be fed and nourished in this place. You are welcome here. You have been made worthy, washed in the blood of the Lamb.

Then as you leave this place, go knowing that, because of the salvation given to us in baptism, nothing can ever really be normal again. We are joined to all the saints and with them we are sent to bring news of God’s amazing grace to our world. For this reason, we can rejoice and be glad.