



**uniting
church**
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Minister's Musings

Martin Luther, Halloween, All Saints and All Souls What does it have to do with us?



Well, it all hangs around *All Saints Day - 1 November* - when the church celebrates, as it says, all the *saints*. In some traditions this means the canonised saints, or what I like to call the “capital S” saints - people like Saint Paul and Saint Peter, Saint Mary Mackillop and the hundreds of others formally recognised by the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches as people of special significance, especially those who don't have a feast day of their own. It was believed that All Saints Day was a “thin place”, a time when God's presence was particularly close, when heaven and earth are particularly close...

In our tradition (in the reformed tradition), *saints* are all of Jesus' followers - all people of faith. In the New Testament, the word *saints* refers to Christians collectively, as well as those who have been set apart by the church or canonised. It is the recognition of the common bond of Christians, both living and dead, and the common bond of the church here on earth and the church triumphant in heaven. As well as celebrating our own place in the communion of saints, in some reformed traditions time is also spent remembering those from among our Christian community who have died during the year.

31 October... - Reformation and Halloween...

The Protestant Reformation begins...

On the evening of 31 October, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the castle church door in Wittenberg, Germany, beginning what became known as the Protestant Reformation. Luther was concerned about the doctrine and practice of *indulgences* – where people paid for forgiveness of their sin (as defined by the church) and for the sins of loved ones who had died. This practice had made the church very wealthy and Luther had had enough. He had come to the view that forgiveness is God's gift of grace to all people. It didn't need to be mediated by the church and the practice of charging a fee for prayer and forgiveness had to be stopped. As well as being misguided theologically, it was impoverishing the very people the church was called to help.



Luther chose this night knowing that most of the town would be attending church the next day – All Saints Day – and would see his statements of concern about the church pinned to the church door. He would get maximum exposure for his claims. And indeed he did, and so began a series of events that would see Luther defending himself before the church authorities, eventually leading to him being excommunicated. The issues Luther

raised, however, didn't end there but sowed the seed for the Protestant Reformation across Europe that took place over the next 100 years or so.

Halloween

The night before All Saints Day was originally known as All Hallows' Eve and, over time, became shortened to Halloween. "Hallows" derives from the old English meaning 'holy' or 'sanctified' (as in "hallowed by thy name"). Tracing its roots to an ancient Celtic day of the dead known as Samhain, it was believed that souls and supernatural beings would wander the night. These souls would then rest again when the believers gathered to celebrate All Saints Day.

Various traditions have merged over time, ranging from praying for saints and "lost souls" to children dressing up in costumes and going from door to door in search of treats.



2 November – All Souls Day

For those traditions who use All Saints Day to commemorate canonised saints, or those whose lives have been particularly Christ-like, All Souls Day on 2 November provides an opportunity to remember other Christians who have died. For many traditions, this is a special day to visit the graves or resting place of loved ones.

Adapted from Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Pentecost 2 2020, p.116 and p.128

So however, you spend these few days, I pray that you will take some time to reflect on the people of faith who have gone before us - people we know personally, and those whose stories we tell. How have their lives shaped yours? Whose examples of faith are important to you? What example of faith are you living for the people around you?

A Prayer Meditation for All Saints Day

We give you thanks, O God, for all the saints who ever worshiped you:

Whether in brush arbors or cathedrals,

Weathered wooden churches or crumbling cement meeting houses

Where your name was lifted and adored.

We give you thanks, O God, for hands lifted in praise:

Manicured hands and hands stained with grease or soil,

Strong hands and those gnarled with age

Holy hands

Used as wave offerings across the land.

We thank you, God, for hardworking saints;

Whether hard-hatted or steel-booted,

Head ragged or aproned,

Blue-collared or three-piece-suited

They left their mark on the earth for you, for us, for our children to come.

Thank you, God, for the tremendous sacrifices made by those who have gone before us.

Bless the memories of your saints, God.

May we learn how to walk wisely from their examples of faith, dedication, worship, and love. Amen.

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/a-prayer-meditation-for-all-saints-day>

Rev Kath Merrifield
28 October 2020