



Life Beyond Death

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

*This week, it would be appropriate to find a **white** cloth or scarf since today is a special day of celebration and remembering.*

Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

Light Candle

We light a candle to remember.

We remember Jesus - the Light of the World - the light that shines even in the darkness and cannot be snuffed out.

We remember that we too are called to be Light to the World.

Acknowledgement of Country

As we gather together in this time and place, we acknowledge the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation

who have cared for this land,
who have gathered, collected and shared food, and
who have nourished each other in story and song
for thousands of years.

We pay our respects to their elders, past and present
who have handed down stories, songs, and wisdom.

Let us learn from the First Peoples of this land,
listening to their innate knowledge
of how to live in this land in harmony with all living things.

May we walk gently and faithfully upon these lands.

Introduction

Today we are celebrating All Saints Day.

In the Roman Catholic Church, All Saints Day recognises the canonised Saints, the ones, if you like, with a capital "S". And All Souls Day (2 November) recognises the ordinary people, the little "s" saints, people we know and love who are no longer amongst us, who together make up the saints of God.

Though we don't typically celebrate the canonised saints of the church and all their various saints' days in our denomination, we do recognise that we have saints in our own lives who have formed our faith in some way and who have passed on from this life.

So today we honour all saints, known or unknown, from near or from far, whose lives have witnessed to the ways of Christ. We remember those saints who have been precious to us through their mentoring, their writing, their prayer, and their example. Though such



Festival of Lights
by John August Swanson.
Copyright © 2000.

remembrance is sometimes tinged with grief, we celebrate that God's table is vast and focus on the image of all these saints gathering together at the feast that God has prepared.

Later in our time of worship we will read aloud the names of the saints in our community who have died in the last year. You will also have the opportunity to light a candle in memory of the saints in your life, whether they died just recently or long ago. And we pray that their memory will continue to be a beacon of faith, hope, and love for us all.

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 24)

The whole earth belongs to God,
all its peoples and its creatures.

***The whole earth is loved by God,
what is now and what has been in times past.***

We join together with people from all places and times
***we join with earth, sea, sky and all creatures
to bring our worship of Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.***

Lift up your heads, O gates!
May the God of all Creation be in our midst!

Let us pray...
We give thanks, O God,
for the Creation, which points to your Love.
We give thanks, O God,
for the saints who have shown us your ways.
We give thanks, O God,
for Christ Jesus, who teaches us to walk justly.
Pour out your Spirit,
that we might encounter you again as we remember and give thanks.
Amen.

Sing - Everyday Loving (Seasons 5-16)

We sing of the love we are called to share everyday

This welcome here is simply free.
It's for the world, for you and me.
We bring our smiles and cares,
our heart's own prayers
and the stories of our days,
to worship God in many ways.
And together we're...
*Ev'ryday loving! Ev'ryday loving!
We're just ev'ryday loving!
The way that God loves us!*

God's love is deep. God's love is wide.
It's all around, and here inside.
So when we lend a hand or take a
stand,

it's love we're sending round.
In ev'ry day, that's where it's found.
And together we're...
Ev'ryday loving!...

Then can we dare to use our eyes,
and tune our ears to others' cries?
To hear the silent words of those
unheard,
and sing with them their song.
We know that God will lead us on.
And together we're...
Ev'ryday loving!...

O God of Earth, you hear us call.
Shower your love upon us all.
And like a mustard seed, the faith we
need

will blossom as we grow.
Give us your faith, to live and show,
that what you're giving is...
Ev'ryday loving!...

Words and Music: Linnea Good

Introduction to the Readings

The Bible Readings today all point to a life that is not contained by death.
They describe a vision for God's world where death does not get the final word.
First, let's listen to the words of Isaiah...

Reading: Isaiah 25:6-9

⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear.

⁷ And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;

⁸ he will swallow up death for ever.

Then the LORD God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

⁹ It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the LORD for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

¹⁰ For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,

Thanks be to God!

Prayer

Often when we remember the saints, we do so with rose-coloured glasses - we remember the highlights and conveniently forget their shortcomings and mistakes.

John Wesley - by all accounts an amazing preacher, a teacher that had high expectations of his pupils, a man willing to travel the length and breadth of his country to preach and to teach. Did you know he was married? Do you know that he and his wife didn't speak a whole lot, living very separate lives? By some accounts, he was a very difficult man to live with!

When we only remember the highlights, we forget the complexities that made them human - that make *us* human.

But God wants every part of us, not just the highlights.
So let us pray...

God, you prepare a banquet table,
you wipe away the tears,
you break weapons of war into tools for peace.
Forgive us
for the times we claim possession of your table,

for the times we cause hurt and injury,
for the violence we enact.

Holy God, we want to make you proud. We want to hide away our faults so no one can see. We want to be considered worthy of sainthood. But you know our faults anyway. You know every detail of our lives.

Forgive us for trying to pretend we're perfect.

Holy God, we confess that we dance along the line between self-improvement and vanity. We read self-help books, listen to sages who tell us how we can achieve perfection, and try to eliminate all the mess from our lives so we can feel in control.

Forgive us for striving to be godlike when all you've ever asked of us is to be human.

Holy God, we forget that even the saints are human. Even the saints are messy and complicated. Our heroes are flawed, our loved ones make mistakes, and our idols aren't really made of solid gold. We confess that we are quick to judge the faults of others we have placed on a pedestal, as though they aren't human too.

Forgive us for expecting too much of one another.

Give us grace to trade the illusion of perfection for the real life you have gifted us, and hold us secure in the promise of your presence with us, always.

Transform our lives,

as we look to the example of those who have lived before us,
and most of all as we follow after Christ.

For it is in Christ's name that we pray for your mercy and grace, Amen.

Words of Grace

Family of faith, hear the good news: you do not have to be perfect to be a saint. You just have to be the person God created you to be.

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the day when, after turmoil, after pain, after confession, God will remove the people's disgrace and swallow up death forever.

Hear this Good News:

God will wipe away the tears from all eyes.

God will lay out the table with plenty.

In Christ, through Christ, because of Christ,

Know that you are forgiven and claim your place in the cloud of witnesses to God's wonder and grace. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Sing - See I Make All Things New (AOV2-7)

Our song echoes the words of Revelation 21 inviting us to see the new things God is already doing in our midst today.

*See I make all things new,
new as night turns to morning.*

The spirit is calling:

"I'm with you; I make all things new."

The rivers are bursting with life,
the stars in the night sky sing praise.

Come to me in joy,
come to me in song.

All of creation rejoice!

See I make all things new...

Trust in the promise of life;
colour the earth with my love.

Come to me in joy;
come to me in song.

Open your hearts, rejoice!

See I make all things new...

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: Revelation 21:1-6a

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

'See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more,

for the first things have passed away.'

⁵ And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' ⁶Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Reading: John 11:32-44

³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' ³⁷But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'

⁴⁰Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'

⁴¹So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' ⁴³When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,

Thanks be to God!

Reflection

Holy God, we rely so much on our senses to know what's real.

We are most comfortable when we see, hear, and feel things for ourselves.

We cling to the tangible because our brains can categorise it and analyse it.

And what we can categorise, we can control.

But there is so much that we can't see, hear, or touch, and it's just as real as anything we can grasp.

Open our hearts, minds, and souls to your wonder and mystery.
Help us trade analysis for curiosity and knowledge for wisdom.
Release our grasp on the things of this world so we can wade into your Word with open hands. Humbly we pray, Amen.

You might remember last week, as we celebrated Eli's baptism, we said a creed together that ends with this affirmation:
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.

I wonder what you think about when you hear those words "in life beyond death"?

Contemporary Western cultures hold death at arm's length. Death and the process of dying are often outsourced to hospitals and funeral directors. Even our gatherings as Christians here in Australia are shaped in part by this culture of death-avoidance. We are happy to talk about life, but less comfortable in the face of death.

Yet, death marks us all the same. We miss our loved ones. We are confronted by the rude and utter interruption that death renders among us. Our loved ones leave indelible marks upon us. We grieve their loss and we often struggle to adjust to life without their presence. And each one of us, one day, will have to confront our own dying.

In the reading we heard from the gospel attributed to John, we heard the story where Jesus raises his friend Lazarus from the dead. The writer doesn't edit out the gritty, smelly, visceral impact of death – the tears that Jesus cries, the smell of the body, the statement of Martha, perhaps with an underlying accusation that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had been present.

And then Jesus raises Lazarus to life again. Death is interrupted - not in some far off dreamy future, but in the midst of everyday living, in the midst of ordinary human experience.

And, while beyond the scope of the story as it is recorded in the Scriptures, we can imagine that eventually Lazarus dies again, as we all will die.

*So back to that line in the creed,
In life, in death, in life beyond death,
God is with us.
We are not alone.
Thanks be to God.*

It speaks of God accompanying us in life, in death, and in life-beyond-death. It calls us to trust that somehow God holds our loved ones even when they are no longer with us. It imagines them caught up in God's great renewal of all things.

The scriptures in Isaiah and Revelation also imagine God's renewing power. They imagine God bringing peace after brokenness and chaos. They are images grasping at something we hope for, trust in, but ultimately cannot comprehend.

So what does all this mean for us, those of us who live and breathe, and love and hope?

What does it mean when we live in a world that sometimes seems like it could not be further from the images painted by the prophet Isaiah of a great feast or of the writer of Revelation of a time when there will be no more sadness, no more pain and death is no more?

What does it mean for us who know the pain of parting from loved ones, who are witnesses to ongoing violence across the worlds and in our own streets and homes?

Rev Sue Lodge in her blog, *Companions on the Way*, reminds us that:

It is an essential part of our faith that we trust, even when we do not really understand how, that death and loss and sadness are not the inevitable end point of human existence, that things end well, that we flourish in love beyond the grave. ¹

So, we believe, that somehow renewal and resurrection is experienced in our everyday human existence, in the midst of the very real loss, pain and suffering we experience.

All Saints and All Souls Days point us to ordinary human beings who showed, taught or achieved something extraordinary in their commitment to following Jesus. They bear witness to the experience of renewal and resurrection in the midst of the ordinary, in the midst of death and loss, ending and apparent failure. They witness to words and actions that bring reconciliation between alienated family members, to love that eases a difficult illness or death, to generosity that eases the struggle of poverty, to hospitality that overcomes isolation and loneliness, to justice that reforms structures and oppressive regimes, to wisdom that charts a patient but persistent path towards the reign of God in the world.

And they point us to the vision of the great feast set by God, to God dwelling in our midst and the transformation of what is, to bring to completion the world as God intended it to be. They point us to the way of Christ Jesus and they invite us to join their company.

So they invite us to take our part in living out the ways of God's reign in the midst of our own grief and struggle and pain, holding on, sometimes desperately, to the promise that these things do not get the final word.

As we reflect on the lives of people of faith who have gone before us, as we think about the people who have been influential on our own growth in faith, may we again fix our eyes on the Christ, the promise of renewal that comes with our own commitment to the hope that love and life will always prevail.

Let us pray...

God of new beginnings,

help us today to be encouraged by the stories of faith of those who have gone before us. Help us to focus again on the call you have placed on our lives to love beyond measure and to hope in your promise that such love will be enough. Amen.

¹ <https://www.companionsontheway.com/post/all-the-saints>

Responding

Sing - Nothing Is Lost On The Breath Of God

We sing of the assurance that nothing is lost in the enfolding of God's love.

Nothing is lost on the breath of
God,
nothing is lost for ever;
God's breath is love, and that love
will remain,
holding the world for ever.
No feather too light, no hair too
fine,
no flower too brief in its glory;
no drop in the ocean, no dust in
the air,
but is counted and told in God's
story.

Nothing is lost to the eyes of God,
nothing is lost for ever;
God sees with love and that love
will remain,
holding the world for ever.
No journey too far, no distance too

great,
no valley of darkness too blinding;
no creature too humble, no child
too small
for God to be seeking, and finding.

Nothing is lost to the heart of God,
nothing is lost for ever;
God's heart is love, and that love
will remain,
holding the world for ever.
No impulse of love, no office of
care,
no moment of life in its fulness;
no beginning too late, no ending
too soon,
but is gathered and known in
God's goodness.

Colin Gibson

Remembering - listen

So let us take time to remember and honour the people we have known and loved who have gone before us.

While they were with us, we saw them face to face.

Their voice, their touch, their smile.

And now, beyond the veil that separates this world and the next, what we see is the glow of their Christ-light, flickering as part of the great cloud of witnesses.

Though we don't see them face to face any longer, their memory lives on in us as their soul lives on in their Creator. Their Christ-light shines just as brightly as before, unbound by the physical limitations of their earthly bodies.

They are now part of the "life beyond death" held in the embrace of God's love.

I invite you now draw to mind the saints in your life - whether they died this past year or long, long ago, you are welcome to come forward and light a candle in memory of them. As you light a candle, you can choose to name them aloud, or quietly in your heart.

Prayer for Others

God, who was at the beginning

and who will be present at the end,

God, who is beyond our imaginings of time,

on this All Saints' Day we bring to you our prayers.

We pray that all people and all creation would be enfolded in your loving-kindness.

We remember our loved ones who have passed into life-beyond-death - those we have named aloud, and those who we hold in the quiet of our hearts.

We miss them, we love them.

We offer them into your care, asking that they will be held by your love even beyond our understanding.

We pray for creatures that are now extinct: animals and plants that we have destroyed.

We mourn their loss.

Teach us to walk gently on the earth and to care for all things, particularly for those creatures whose future seems tenuous.

We pray for each other: for this community and the wider community of human neighbours near and far.

Our hearts break for the places where violence and war seem to prevail.

We long for the day when every pain shall cease and every tear shall be wiped away.

We yearn to share around your enormous table and to hear the laughter of children and the conversation of friends.

Teach us this day to seek out justice.

May ours be the hands that your Spirit uses to transform the world into Christ's likeness.

We pray in the name of the Christ whom we follow. Amen.

Offering

This part of our service is not about the money.

It is about considering how we will respond to what we have seen and heard and experienced this morning, or perhaps throughout the week - how is God prompting you, nudging you, inspiring you - and what will you do about it?

Each one of us is precious.

Each one of us has something to offer in terms of resources - time, energy, skills, money.

How will you respond?

Holy God, you knit us together, threading our lives with the generations before us and the generations after us. May these gifts be used to continue the work our ancestors began and to build on what we are doing now. Into your hands, we entrust these gifts so that our unfinished work will one day be complete. Amen.

Sending

Sing - Song Of Faith That Sings Forever (tune: Ode To Joy (TIS 698))

Our song is one that reminds us of the song of faith sung throughout generations.

It is written by Shirley Murray who says this about the song:

It is dedicated to my life-long friend, Fath Christine Williamson. I wrote this to give myself courage, a reminder in time when the Church seems to stagger along, of the people who have never stopped singing.

Song of faith that sings forever
through God's people, ages long,
Word that holds the world together
when our hearts take up the song,
always, always somewhere sounding,

though the source we do not see,
counterpoint to all despairing
it is hope that sets the key.

Song of faith in exultation,
rising through the vaults of prayer,
tune of simple celebration
offered up in open air,
song in chapel and cathedral,
descant to our daily tone,
song from sickbed or in prison:
faith must often sing alone.

And when life would overwhelm us,
when there seems no song to sing,
hear the constant voice of courage
out of fear and suffering:
all who've loved and trusted Jesus,
all who lift us to be strong,
endless, endless are the voices
of the faith that makes the song.

Shirley Erena Murray

Sending and Blessing

God's Spirit has rested upon those who have gone before us.
Christ Jesus has shown you the way.
And even more... look around you,
see the people to your left and to your right,
sitting in front and behind,
God has given you these companions for the journey.

Receive God's blessing of saints,
as you live in and from the love of the Triune One. Amen.

Liturgy drawn from:

Sanctified Art, Special Sundays Liturgy For All Saints Day

Bec Lindsay, *Liturgy, Learning, and (purposeful) Life*, Resources for All Saints Day 2024

Rev Kath Merrifield
3 November 2024