



Saint Stories 2022

Pastor John Klawiter

November 6, 2022

All Saints Sunday

Luke 20:27-38

Do any of you remember the VBS song “I just wanna be a sheep?”

I just wanna be a sheep, Baa, baa, baa, baa

I just wanna be a sheep, Baa, baa, baa, baa

I pray the Lord my soul to keep

I just wanna be a sheep, Baa, baa, baa, baa,

There’s a verse about Sadducees... do you remember how that ends?

I don’t wanna be a Sadducee...

Cause they’re so “sad” you see

Why are they sad????

They don’t believe in the resurrection. That Jesus rose from the dead. They don’t think that’s possible.

But today, we remember all of the people in our church that have died... and we don’t have to be sad, you see... why not?

Because of the resurrection, they’re in heaven!

Great shepherd... we are your sheep... and we’re not sad... but thankful... for the love of your saints... in heaven, and on earth. Amen.

Grace and peace to you my brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Sadducees aren’t just “Sad, you see”... they’re clever. They’re trying to trap Jesus. Trick him. Make him answer a question that they don’t really have an investment in the answer.



They don't believe in resurrection—it says it right at the beginning of the reading!—so they don't care who is married to who “in heaven”. It's this life that matters. When you die, it's all over.

The Sadducees reject immortality of the soul. They were wealthy and powerful community leaders who liked to flaunt their status.

They would be proud of asking such a clever question like “which husband will this woman have in heaven.”

I bet, after Jesus left the room, they all patted each other on the back and said “great question!” and none of them cared about the answer.

They are the types of people when presented with new information continue to disregard it and weren't truly interested in learning from the person they asked the question.

I find their conversation as disingenuous.

In my line of work, I get a lot of genuine questions about what's to come and what's next. Unlike the Sadducees, I think this is a curiosity because we don't want to believe that this is all in vain. We wanna believe in something bigger.

So what is next?

I have no idea... scripture gives us a lot of images, but nothing so concrete that it translates to something we can see in this world. How could we even begin to accurately describe it? I can't.

I do know it's greater than anything I can imagine. Scripture also gives us plenty of support from Jesus that dwelling in heaven means that the resurrection is real.

Jesus Christ has promised us eternal life. What that eternal life looks like and how is everything organized and how many husbands does this woman have in heaven??? I don't need to know those answers.

They aren't the right questions.

When Jesus says “he is God not of the dead, but of the living; for to him all of them are alive (SLIDE of scripture).”

We believe in the living God—on earth AND in in heaven—we are all alive.

We are all inter-connected. The saints of this world and the saints that have already gone to the next.



This is All Saints Sunday. The lives of those saints who've gone before us is full of stories about loved ones who influenced who we are. Loved one taught us how to live, how to love, how to know Jesus.

We had 40 chimes. 40. We've been through a lot this year, Faith.

I'm grateful for our phenomenal partnerships with our Forest Lake funeral homes: Roberts and Mattsons, as well as the occasional service with Grandstrands funeral home. Plus our staff, especially Deanna and musicians Linda and Alan. Our funeral meal crew.

Pastor Steve, Deacon Nina, and our recently retired member, Pastor Marlene, have presided over funerals, too. Walking alongside the families who are seeking answers to those eternal life questions is holy work. It truly takes a village.

I won't tell you stories about everyone, but one of the gifts of the pandemic is that many of the funerals are now recorded and can be viewed again to remember the stories of our loved ones by searching our YouTube channel or the obituary.

It began on November 1st, 2021 and the famous last words of Mary Luke, a die hard Vikings fan who watched her beloved team lose to the Dallas Cowboys with their back-up quarterback on Halloween.

Mary had been mostly unresponsive for days. Hadn't spoken, but then, as the game ended, she perked up and said, clear as a bell, "When we gonna get rid of Zimmer?"

Mary died the next morning. The Vikings head coach was fired immediately following the season.

Therese Engquist loved the dark. She died in Advent—skipping straight over the season of waiting for Christmas and found herself smack in the promise of Easter resurrection. I wore shades to demonstrate the brightness of heaven as she witnessed it in all its glory.

Therese loved Christmas and buying presents for the Toys for Tots drive, but missed her chance to go shopping last year. As a tribute, loved ones made up for it by bringing tons of gifts to be donated to last year's Toys for Tots drive.

What a gift, literally, to remember her legacy.

Speaking of giving, three of our saints served our country in World War II. Elmer Stromquist, Reinhold "Mickey" Lang, and Art Anderson.

Reinhold was called Mickey because his ears resembled a famous Disney character. He hated Covid because it was so isolating. A few months into the pandemic, his home



health nurse decided it was time for an important prescription. She said it was safe for him to get hugs again from his family when they came to see him.

Mickey had a competitive side. Two weeks before he died, Mickey was playing pool. He is ready to make the winning shot... and then this happened. VIDEO of Mickey

He made the shot, but scratched and lost the game... so he chucked his pool cue on the table.

Mickey died on his 96th birthday, but when he was fighting in World War II, his 1st Lieutenant was killed right next to him and he always wondered why him and not me?

One of our other World War II veterans had a similar near-death experience that was so unbelievable that Ripley's Believe it Not had to tell the story (slide of Art's stuff).

Art Anderson, our oldest member at 102, almost didn't survive World War II.

Art was hit by shrapnel. He lost an eye and suffered severe wounds, but his life was spared because the shrapnel that hit his heart was deflected by his New Testament Bible that he carried in his breast pocket.

"Miraculously, the word on which the most powerful bit of shrapnel spent its strength was the word 'clemency.'"—mercy. Mercifully, Art was saved.

Rodney Erickson was not a veteran, but his love of this country was undeniable.

Rodney was proud of his country, proud of his church, proud of his family. There was always a great story anytime you spoke with him.

Rodney was part of the welcoming committee—greeting you with a firm handshake and as you entered this sanctuary. One of those stories he loved to share was about his dad. He started many conversations here at Faith with, "my father helped build this church."

Speaking of building. One of the most impressive houses I've seen built was by John Fischer. Who built his own cabin... but not the kind of cabin for this life, but a cabin for the next (slide of John's cabin).

John is a believer in the resurrection and he spared no detail in the cabin he built to place his ashes in after he died.

We had a funeral for a member, Candi Anderson, who lived in Florida, but had roots in Forest Lake. We heard the stories of Bill Klossner, who survived more flooding than Noah—each house he lived in had a flood story. We heard the stories of Daniel Paulson, gone much too soon, and we heard how Dr. Messelt would frequently sing Oh What a Beautiful Morning, sometimes to help calm the nerves of a patient.



One of the stories we didn't know about Claudia Johnson was about a secret crush that she had. We knew George, her husband who was a firefighter, was aware of it, but it didn't make it any less shocking.

Claudia's family insisted that during the funeral, I had to acknowledge her affection for a certain actor... Matthew McConaughey (slide), who whenever his Lincoln Commercial would come on would yell out "Alert!"

I can honestly say, I never would have expected to end a funeral sermon with the expression "Alright, alright, alright..." but there's a first for everything.

Like Claudia with George, we had many couples reunited, some of them within a short span. Jim and Joanne Parsons had funerals months apart with the musical talents of Chaplain Tom Nyman who preached here a few weeks ago. Bill and Joan Groth, Doug and Gail Holtan, and more.

Recently, we had a service for Joyce Winnick, whose husband, Jerry had died a few months earlier. Jerry is Jewish and his service was held by the Masons in town, but Joyce's funeral honored their shared faith in God and lifted up some of the passions that the two of them had for animals, including the important work they did in establishing the Northwoods Humane Society.

Joyce loved animals... especially cats. Her beloved Hale was at her bedside when she died and arrangements were made ahead of time for Hale to have a home.

But on the day of the funeral, I needed to make an announcement. There were more cats. In fact, I told everyone that we wouldn't let anyone leave until all the kittens were claimed and had a loving home.

Horrified looks spread upon the faces of the congregation... until I pulled out the stuffed kitten that Joyce's nephew, Ben, had bought for all of the guests to bring home as a keepsake.

Another keepsake that will never be forgotten is the yellow croc. The reminder of Dylan Marshall. I'm wondering if orders from Amazon have finally stopped coming in from him—but we all depended on the promise of resurrection to be delivered, with his teammates gathered, many learning about death for the first time—we clung to hope.

We've had a visual reminder of Dylan in worship since Easter—and you may not have even known it.

On the cross, we've left two of the butterflies attached. These were made by Dylan with his family, not long before his earthly journey came to an end.



Today, I return these butterflies to Dylan's family.

We have permission to grieve, to mourn, to even be "Sad you see". We can wonder and ask questions about these saints who've left us.

But we don't have to be afraid.

Our God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. The resurrection is for real. The victory is ours. Amen