

All Saints began as a day to remember the martyrs of the faith, those who had died rather than reject their faith. Over time its focus included all the faithful who had died over the past year, and eventually it celebrated the lives of all who embraced Christ as Lord and Savior. In a sense it is a Veterans' Day of the faithful. Just as later this week we will honor those who serve and defend this country, as Christians we honor all who serve and embrace Christ as the giver and savior of life.

Last week brought a popular national holiday – Halloween, a moment devoted to hiding behind costumes. Sometimes when faith is inconvenient or not politically correct it is tempting to back down or hide what we truly believe. Anyone can admit what Jesus means when you are sitting in a church. To honestly share faith when others will disagree, or challenge, means faith must be real. Jesus never said faith would make living easy, only that it would value and purpose to life.

Many lament the pagan influences of Halloween. But to be honest, I worry a lot more about the pagan influences on everyday living! Rather than worrying about children wearing costumes, we should worry about adults who are timid to admit their gift of faith or seek to hide faith from those around them. It is like someone who promises to pray for another as a way of support but fails to follow through with actual prayer. Is faith limited to slogans and convenient responses or is it powerful and helpful every day? Do we live by faith, or do we hide what we believe and live by other values?

1 John 3 says, “we are children of God, but world doesn't recognize us.” That is a total reversal of Halloween! When popular wisdom and contemporary culture says we are foolish to have faith, are we embarrassed? Do we surrender when we are told we cannot hold beliefs or values different than what current political correctness accepts? If we hide faith, we not only waste a precious gift but hide the light which can chase shadows away. Do we believe what we believe? If the world cannot understand faith, that doesn't lessen the power of faith, but does reveal an opportunity to share.

When Mary's brother Lazarus died, she wasn't quite sure *what* to believe. She assumed Jesus was too late to help, and cried out, “If you were only here, this wouldn't have happened!” Her mournful accusation was a question the world knows all too well. “Why did this happen? I thought you loved him more than this!” (How familiar that is to us all.) Jesus wept. His tears were the same as always for the consequential death of every earthly life. Sin breaks God's heart and is the ultimate manifestation of how far we have strayed from God. Death is real, it is powerful, it is painful – and Jesus wept for that loss. Then his love allowed those tears to wash feet and embrace our death so that it might be changed once and for all.

The image of a man walking out of a tomb, dragging the wrappings of death appears more like Halloween than the Gospel. How real, for who can ever escape death? Who isn't held back by this dark power? In freeing Lazarus, Jesus proclaimed what he came to do for us all! He has unmasked our fears and taken away our need to hide. The next time someone came walking out of a tomb in the Gospel it would be Jesus on Easter. But he would escape completely and cleanly, leaving the wrappings of death

where they belong – hidden from the faithful. He would leave the costume behind and completely destroy death's power for all people and for all time! That is why it is so important for the world to hear this great news!

We worship today, sandwiched between Veterans Day and Halloween, and are reminded of the call to believe what we believe, and be willing to give our lives over to the living and serving of the faith. Faith, like any service, is surrender for another. Today we honor all who have found the willingness to do so, and pray for God to keep us steadfast in our embrace of the faith that has changed death and life forever.

There is a constant in every life. Whatever anyone believes will be the force and power of that life. If we believe in Christ Jesus and his love, it will become the energy of EVERY moment of our lives. So, the only question becomes: Do I believe what I say I believe? Is faith a collection of memorized answers or is it the power that changes how I live? The moment this reality struck me I was leading Easter worship soon after my first wife's death. I realized either faith would be real for me, or I needed to find a new job. When I surrendered to faith, I was never disappointed. In other words, faith must become more than a concept, it is a lifestyle.

For every one of us here today, it is the same. Do we live by faith, or do we need to find a new purpose and power and vision for each day on this earth? An athlete cannot be part of a team for only 10% of a game and be of any value. A parent cannot ignore children when they seem to be a burden and expect to have a positive influence in their lives years later. A spouse cannot fail to trust a partner and expect the marriage to last. A candidate for office cannot present an image for the public that is completely different than reality and expect to last in office for very long. If people do not believe what they claim is important, it really isn't important or real, is it?

When it comes to faith in Jesus Christ – do you live what you say you believe? Do actions match words? Does your living match your faith? Does the witness of your life match the witness of your faith? (And if you are not certain how to answer, I guarantee those who know you best will tell you what they know by what they see.)

As we celebrate all saints, we are focused on Easter – the biggest holy day of all! We have been changed from sinners into saints. From dead men and women walking into a new creation that is waking with the breath of God's own Spirit. We have faith due to those veterans who have led brought us to this day. And our faith is not only a lifestyle but a witness and legacy for others.

Such a great gift must never be hidden. Instead of fearing to let the world know how we have been blessed, we are invited by the freedom of Christ to never be afraid to let others know who we are and what we believe. Saints are sent as God's gifts to God's world. Jesus' command to unbind and set Lazarus free, were spoken not only to the friends who would help him back into life but also to each of us. This is our joyful burden of ministry. Because we believe Easter's power, we share this vision with the world by living what we believe and by unbinding and setting others free.

Let us pray, daily, for God to help us to be what he has made us -- saints who know who they are and live what they believe! It isn't as difficult a task as you might assume, if we surrender to faith and allow God's power to be your guiding light and the passion of your living.

We are never alone, and our lives are gifts of, by, and for all the saints. -- tws