



'For All the Saints'

All Saints Sunday
8:30 & 10:45 am, November 6, 2016
The Reverend Nancy R. Easton
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

[Psalm 149](#); [Ephesians 1:11-23](#); [Luke 6:20-31](#)

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

My husband Randy and I and our three children have inherited a variety of items from our parents, grandparents, and other family members of earlier generations.

Some things we've inherited have purely sentimental value: The set of china from Grandma Burglund that I bring out to use every Thanksgiving. My father's tie clip, now worn by our son Matthew. Randy's pocket knife that once resided in the pocket of his Grandpa Smith.

Some things have monetary value, to be sure: For example, the gift that Aunt Kay left in her will for our children was able to put a small but significant dent in their college tuition bills.

And some things we've inherited are absolutely priceless:
A ceramic dog, one of the first Christmas gifts my late father, who grew up very poor, ever received as a child—he treasured it, and, knowing that, so do I. A notebook my mother-in-law gave me a couple years before she died—in it she wrote down her favorite Bible verses, lyrics to hymns that touched her heart, and inspirational quotes that encouraged her on her faith journey. She wanted me to have it.

Whatever the "assessed value" of these things given to us, we treasure them all, and remember with love and affection the people from whom they came.

The whole notion of "inheritance" came to mind as I studied our reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians this week. Paul, in lush language, describes what God has given us through Jesus Christ, and he uses the word "inheritance" in a couple different places. Now, Paul tended to write in elaborate, run-on sentences, so sometimes we have to pick them apart to get the full range of meaning, but first just listen to the first verses from today's passage: "In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:11-12)

We'll parse those words in a moment, but meanwhile, think back to Old Testament stories—there was an inheritance mentioned there, too. There was an inheritance

promised by the Lord God to Abraham and Sarah, and later to Isaac and Jacob. It was a promise of a land for the people Israel to call home, a people whom God would free from slavery and then lead to that land. It was a promise that the descendants born in the line of Abraham would live there as God's chosen people. That land, called Canaan, would be a place where God's good and beautiful community could flourish.

So much of the rest of the Old Testament deals with this promised inheritance—how it was given, then lost in war and sin and faithlessness, then given again by God's grace. Jerusalem as the city on a hill was seen as the focal point of that land, the jewel in God's promised inheritance to his people.

But Paul in the New Testament, having come to know the Risen Lord Jesus, is not talking about an inheritance of **land** in those verses I just read. He's talking about something else entirely. "Inheritance" is not about land or possessions, or any object or item in particular. It's really about a **people**. Paul declares that in Christ we have obtained an inheritance so that we might "live to the praise of his glory." So that you and I and all who follow Jesus Christ, all who make up the church, past, present, and future, might "live to the praise of his glory." Might live and act and speak and be in ways that praise God in Christ every day on this earth of ours.

And if we're wondering how in the world we will do that—how we will "live to the praise of his glory" when we are painfully aware of our shortcomings and self-absorption, and know that we often don't lead particularly praise-worthy lives—well, we'll need to read Paul's words that come next when he mentions an "inheritance" once more. Paul writes this: "In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 11:13-14)

God gives to us his powerful Holy Spirit as part of that inheritance. It is a power promised to us in our baptism into Jesus Christ, and then it's poured upon you and me so that we might indeed live and act and speak and be in ways that praise God every day. So in spite of our failings which we know all too well, we can trust God is at work liberally showering us with that Spirit in order to make us the people God dreams us to be.

And if Paul is right that this inheritance is ultimately something about a people empowered by God to live lives of praise on this earth, then it also happens to be an inheritance we can pass on. By the grace of God, you and I possess unique gifts of the Spirit in our personhood that we can share with others. It's so much more than a pocketknife or a set of china or money. It's God at work in us and through us that becomes our gift, our inheritance for the people closest to us whom we love and know well, for the neighbor we meet, and for our brothers and sisters a half a world away.

But we know about that inheritance already, don't we? Because there are people who have bestowed their gifts on us. On this All Saints Sunday, we remember with devotion our loved ones who have gone to be even closer to God in his eternal presence. And it is on a day like this where we also reflect on the inheritance they passed to us.

However long and full their lives, or however brief if they died much too young, each of them gave something to us. From one person we learned about courage, from another perseverance. One dear saint sang like a lark in the choir, another gave generously of time and resources to our church and local community. One served our nation with distinction, another guided her children and grandchildren with wisdom and care. One little one filled our hearts with love, another made us laugh until tears streamed down our faces. No monetary value in these things we inherited, but priceless nonetheless.

We'll say their names in our prayers today. Or we'll read their names on our altar cloth before us. Why, here is where I wrote my mother-in-law's name—Mary Elaine Easton—the woman who gave me a small notebook that demonstrated her deep faith in God, but who, more importantly, lived that faith out in her gracious and genuine love toward me. What an inheritance I have been given!

Oh, yes, what good we received from them all, and what good we can pass on, as we “live to the praise of his glory.” **AMEN.**

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