

# ALL SAINTS SUNDAY

SCRIPTURE READING: *To be read during Holy Communion*

**1 Corinthians 15:12-57, various (15:16-18, 20, 35-38a, 42b-44, 54-55, 57)**

[16] "But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen . . .What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. . . .When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

**John 14:1-27, various (14:1-4)**

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going."

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

[13] Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. [14] We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. [15] According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. [18] Therefore encourage each other with these words.

**Revelation 7:4-17**

[4] Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel...

[9] After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. [10] And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." ...

[13] Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?"

[14] I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. [15] Therefore,

"they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.

[16] Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. [17] For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

TEXT: Hebrews 12:1-2a, 3b “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. [2] Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart

**Powerpoint:** What It’s Like after You Die

SERMON: “What’s It Like After You Die”

Today is All Saint’s Sunday. Last week we celebrated Halloween, acknowledging that there is indeed evil rampant in our world. Yet Halloween should only be celebrated in connection to All Saint’s Day. You see, All Saint’s confirms that even though evil is real in our world, those who place their trust in Jesus shall always overcome. Not even death shall defeat them! In Christ, we always have the victory over evil; evil need not be feared, just fought.

**Powerpoint:** Remembering the saints who have gone on before.

This past year we’ve had a number of those dear to us join the ranks of those saints who have gone on before us. We give God thanks for them and their influence in our lives, and the enduring legacy they leave. Revelation 14:13 says, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.” Those that put their trust in Jesus are not dead. They have died in this life, but they are not dead. Jesus’ resurrection is applied to those who die in Him. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

So as we remember our loved ones, and those in whose legacy we now stand, we need not let our hearts be troubled. We can have peace and comfort, knowing that they are in a better place, that they have gone on to glory. And we look forward to that some day when we will join with them and again be reunited with them.

**Powerpoint:** Where are those saints now?

But in the class I’m leading before worship every morning, we wrestle with all kinds of tough questions. One of the questions raised is where are those who have died in Christ, right now? Where is Rev. Blackford right now? Where is Marge Greer? Ron Johnson? Now, we say they are with Jesus and in glory...but is that true? How much of what we believe comes from Hollywood, and how much comes actually from the Bible? If so, what are they doing? Can they see us? Do they know what we’re doing...thinking? Do they ever come back to visit the earth?

**Powerpoint:** *Halloween-style picture of ghosts/spirits.*

Last week on Halloween there were all kinds of decorations of dead people supposedly coming back to life, and of ghosts and spirits of the dead roaming the earth. If you talk to different people, there’s all kinds of ideas out there. Everyone has their own ideas for what happens after you die. It’s been interesting to watch the movies over the past 20 years to see what Hollywood has tried to do with the whole life after death thing. Or watch TV. There are whole shows devoted to trying to figure out what happens after you die. Back up in Duluth, at Glensheen Mansion, there have been

supposed sightings of a ghost, perhaps that of the heiress, Elizabeth Congdon, or her nurse, Velma Pietila, who were murdered there in 1977. That's typical of the hunted house theory—all over the world—that sometimes when someone is tragically murdered, their restless soul wanders around where they were murdered, forever seeking restitution.

**Powerpoint:** *Ghostbuster icon from the movie.*

Do Christians believe that? ... Absolutely not. There is no biblical evidence for such ghost stories. I would argue, however, that it is in Satan's best interest to trick people into thinking that ghosts existed, as a ploy to discredit the biblical claim for the afterlife. It takes away from what the Bible teaches. But aren't there a couple of ghost stories in the Bible? We'll come back to that.

But if there are no such thing as ghosts, then what does happen to us after we die? What are the saints doing right now? Let's take a closer look at what Scripture says about that this morning.

**Powerpoint:** The End Times

Well, the Bible teaches quite a bit about the final plan God has for the earth. Yet the specifics about the final days are vague and fuzzy. But we are certainly taught the broad plan.

**Powerpoint:** The End Times

-Jesus comes back.

One day, when God says the time is right, Jesus will come back. He will come back descending from the sky (Matthew 26:64), or as the angel says in Acts 1:11, He will return the same way He ascended into heaven.

**Powerpoint:** The End Times

-Jesus comes back  
-With the angels of heaven.

He will come back with the hosts of heaven, all the legions of angles accompanying Him.

**Powerpoint:** The End Times

-Jesus comes back  
-With the angels of heaven  
-Dead in Christ will rise & meet Him

Those who have died in Christ will be raised from the dead in a bodily form and will to go meet Him "in the sky."

**Powerpoint:** The End Times

-Jesus comes back  
-With the angels of heaven  
-Dead in Christ will rise & meet Him  
-Alive in Christ will meet Him

Then, after the dead are raised, those who are still alive will be caught up with Christ in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

**Powerpoint: The End Times**

- Jesus and company will descend to earth

The great party will all descend to earth, where Jesus will judge between the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:37, also Hebrews 9:28).

**Powerpoint: The End Times**

- Jesus and company will descend to earth
- Jesus will judge all people

The sheep are those who love Jesus, and they will be taken with Jesus into heaven.

**Powerpoint: The End Times**

- Jesus and company will descend to earth
- Jesus will judge all people
- Goats are cast into eternal fire

The goats are those who do not know Jesus, and they will be cast into the eternal fire.

**Powerpoint: The End Times**

- Jesus and company will descend to earth
- Jesus will judge all people
- Goats are cast into eternal fire
- Final battle between Jesus and Satan

Then there will be a great, final battle between Jesus and the angels on one side, against Satan and the fallen angels on the other. Now, depending on how you read a couple of Scriptures, the battle could happen before Jesus judges the earth and casts the goats into the fire.

**Powerpoint: The End Times**

- Jesus wins the final battle

Either way, Jesus will win, and then will cast all the fallen angels into the great fire, and finally Satan himself, before sealing up the fiery pit and casting it away for ever.

**Powerpoint: The End Times**

- Jesus wins the final battle
- Fallen angels and Satan cast into eternal fire
- Eternal fire cast away

The old heavens and the old earth will be burned away, and God will bring down heaven to the earth (2 Peter 3:11-13).

**Powerpoint: The End Times**

- Heaven and earth burned away

God will recreate earth, calling it the New Jerusalem, making heaven on earth.

**Powerpoint: The End Times**

- Heaven and earth burned away
- Earth recreated: heaven

The saints will live forever with resurrected and perfected, physical bodies, on a re-made and perfected, physical earth, forever and ever.

**Powerpoint: The End Times**

- Heaven and earth burned away
- Earth recreated: heaven
- Saints live forever on earth

All will be restored to the original paradise.

**Powerpoint: The End Times**

- Heaven and earth burned away
- Earth recreated: heaven
- Saints live forever on earth
- Saints have perfected physical bodies

So we get new bodies. That means we really care nothing for our old bodies when we die. We can bury them, burn them, or throw them overboard into the sea. God doesn't need our old bodies in order to make us new ones.

**Powerpoint:** Revelation 20:13 reports that when Christ comes back, "The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done."

Revelation 20:13 reports that when Christ comes back, "The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done." We will be raised physically, but for those who die in Christ, we will be raised with new bodies, perfect in every way. Even the bodies that were eaten by sharks.

**Powerpoint:** Philippians 3:21 Christ will come back and "transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body."

Paul says in Philippians 3:21 that Christ will come back and "transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body." After Jesus' resurrection, He was given a new body, one that Thomas could touch, and a body with which the resurrected Jesus sat with the disciples and ate with them. His body also kept the scars of His crucifixion. But Jesus' new body was also different and distinct. The disciples didn't recognize Jesus when they walked with Him on the road to Emmaus that first Easter. He somehow passed through walls to appear to the 11 locked up in the upper room.

**Powerpoint:** Our new bodies:

- 1 Corinthians 15 "But God gives it a body as he has chosen....raised imperishable....raised in glory....raised in power.... raised a spiritual body."

The new and glorious body is described in 1 Corinthians 15. "But God gives it a body as he

has chosen....raised imperishable....raised in glory....raised in power.... raised a spiritual body.” It is a body of “imperishability” and “immortality.” It will be a body that is untouched by disease, sickness, dysfunction, aging, failure or death. It is a body fit for heaven!

**Powerpoint:** Heaven: Indescribable

- Bible uses idea of comparison
- What is best here is insignificant there

This heaven is described in the grandest of terms, because it cannot be accurately described using words and language. You will have to experience it to understand it. It cannot be explained. But, for *comparison sake*, the best things we have here are insignificant there. Precious gold here is like pavement in heaven. The New Jerusalem is far better than we can ever hope to imagine.

**Powerpoint:** Heaven: Indescribable

- Heavenly mansion: We will be w/Jesus

Jesus describes heaven as a mansion in John 14, where we all live with Him in God’s house. So...now watch this...heaven means: having immediate access to God. Heaven is living with God “face to face.” It’s not necessarily one big mansion!

**Powerpoint:** Heaven: Indescribable

- Heavenly mansion: We will be w/Jesus
- Heavenly banquet: Festive experience

Jesus also talks about heaven being like a grand, festive feast, where there is room for everyone, and He is the host. And heaven is life forever. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, so that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.”

**Powerpoint:** Heaven: Undescribable

- Heavenly mansion: We will be w/Jesus
- Heavenly banquet: Festive experience
- Forever (Psalm 23:6, John 11:25; 12:24-26)

This is even declared way back in Psalm 23, which ties in heaven as living with God, by ending: “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (23:6b). (Also John 11:25 and John 12:24-26).

**Powerpoint:** Heaven: Indescribable

- Heavenly mansion: We will be w/Jesus
- Heavenly banquet: Festive experience
- Forever (Psalm 23:6, John 11:25; 12:24-26)
- Peaceful/no conflict (Isaiah 2:4; 11:6)

We have those wonderful passages in Isaiah that describe how swords will be beaten into plowshares, there will be no more war (Isa. 2:4), and how the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf with the lion, and a little child shall lead them (Isa. 11:6).

**Powerpoint:** Heaven: Indescribable

- Heavenly mansion: We will be w/Jesus
- Heavenly banquet: Festive experience
- Forever (Psalm 23:6, John 11:25; 12:24-26)
- Peaceful/no conflict (Isaiah 2:4; 11:6)
- Do death or sorrow or pain (Rev. 21:4)

Revelation 21:4 says that there will be no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain. He will wipe away every tear. And there will be no more sin. Everything—and everyone—will be just the way God intends it.

An interesting aside is that in Matthew 22:30, Jesus says that after the resurrection there will be no more marriage, but instead we will all be like angels. I don't know what that might mean, but it could be that we will all be so close and intimate, so in love with everyone, that it will be like we share that marriage relationship with not just one person, but with everyone.

**Powerpoint:** Where are the saints now?

So what about before then? What happens between now and when Jesus comes back and sets up heaven in completion? What are the saints doing right now, as they wait for the final coming?

**Powerpoint:** God lives outside of time

- Time is part of creation

Well, before we tackle that, I get a sense that at least to some degree, the questions themselves are faulty. I'm not so sure they're actually in a "now," right now! You see, time is relative. God does not live in time. God created time when He created everything. Before creation, there was no day or night or month or year. There was nothing to measure time with. So *God lives outside of time*. We, and all of creation, live in time. But God does not. That is why "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Hebrews 13:8).

**Powerpoint:** God does not live in time

- Time is part of creation
- To God a day is like 1,000 years
- 2 Peter 3:8, Psalm 90:4

The Bible says that with God, "a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8, also Psalm 90:4).

So, since when we die we leave the constraints of earth, perhaps we also leave the constraints of time. Perhaps the saints are not sitting around somewhere waiting for the time when Jesus is to come back. Maybe after death, they go to be with Jesus, and to them, it is "in the twinkling of an eye" that Jesus then comes back. So, maybe the moment a person dies on earth, is the same moment in God that Jesus returns, although to us here on earth many years pass. Time is relative.

**Powerpoint:** Those who have died in Christ

- Are "asleep"

And remember, Jesus and the Bible, don't talk about the dead being actually dead. Jesus says that Lazarus *is sleeping*, as well as the little girl He raises. But then in Luke 11:15, He clarifies to the people that Lazarus is what we call dead. When Stephan is stoned, the Bible reports that he "fell

asleep” (Acts 7:60). Sleep is used to show that they are not truly dead. Jesus says in Luke 20:38 that to God, all people are alive, even those who have died. The God of Abraham is a God of the living, even though on earth Abraham is dead.

**Powerpoint:** Those who have died in Christ

- Are “asleep”
- Enjoy rest (Job 3:17, Isaiah 57:2)
- Enjoy peace (Rev. 14:13)

Sleep is also used to indicate that to some degree, those who have died enjoy a kind of rest, a kind of peace. This is where the “Rest In Peace” phrase comes from. Isaiah 57:2 says, “Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death” (also Job 3:17). Again back to Revelation 14:13 it says, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on....they will rest from their labor.” That rest seems to indicate that their toil in this world is over. They inherit not so much a place as they do a rest and a peace.

**Powerpoint:** Those who have died in Christ

- Are “asleep”
- Enjoy rest (Job 3:17, Isaiah 57:2)
- Enjoy peace (Rev. 14:13)
- Await new bodies

Yes, their bodies have stopped living, but the actual person is not dead. The person has instead simply shed his body. When we have a funeral, we bury the body. But the person is not there. Whatever makes that person really that person, is not dead. That part of us that really makes us who we are, we often call the soul. So, after the saints have died, their souls keep on living. Yet for the Bible, to be completely human means having a body. So that is why in the end, God will give us bodies again, perfect bodies. That is why Jesus had a body after His resurrection. But remember when Mary first saw Jesus early Easter morning? He told her not to touch Him because He had not yet gone to His Father (John 20:17). It seems He had not yet received His new body.

**Powerpoint:** Those who have died in Christ

- Are “asleep”
- Await new bodies
- Are with Jesus

Now, even if the moment of our death on earth is the moment in God of Christ’s return, the Bible does use images to help us imagine what the dead may be doing. For certain, they are with Jesus. To the thief dying on the cross next to Him, Jesus promised, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). It will not be heaven yet, for that will be completed *after* Christ returns. But it will be paradise, it will be glory, because it will be with Jesus. Jesus says in John 12:26 “Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, my servant will also be.” Paul says that Christians “would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8), and personally he confesses, “I desire to depart and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23).

**Powerpoint:** Those who have died in Christ

- Are “asleep”
- Await new bodies

- Are with Jesus
- Are in “paradise,” but not yet “heaven”

Jesus promises in John 14:3 that “I go to prepare a place for you. I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” Where does Christ go? Again, we’re not exactly sure.

**Powerpoint:** Those who have died in Christ

- Are “asleep”
- Await new bodies
- Are with Jesus, **in glory**
- Are in “paradise,” but not yet “heaven”

But we know He goes to glory, sitting at God’s right hand. When Stephen is dying, it says, “But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” Before Jesus’ death, when He was praying in the Garden, Jesus prays, “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world” (John 17:24).

**Powerpoint:** Revelation’s glory scene (Ch. 7)

So, it seems that the souls of those who have died get to go be with Jesus until He comes back. I checked this out with the visions John had in the Book of Revelation. The visions were glimpses into heaven, and glimpses of the end times. Now, in Revelation, the New Heaven and New Earth are described in chapter 21, with the coming of the New Jerusalem. But 14 chapters before that vision of the final coming of heaven, John gets a glimpse into the center of glory. In chapter 7, John sees the 144,000 sealed souls (7:4), and the great multitude from every nation and every tribe wearing white robes (9-14). This is after they had died, but before Christ returned. These are the elect, and those who will be in heaven eventually.

**Powerpoint:** Revelation’s glory scenes (Ch. 4 & 7)

- Dead in Christ stand before God’s throne
- Never need anything
- Never suffer
- Live forever

But before that, John learns that:

1. They stand before the throne of God and serve Him night and day (7:15)
2. They will never be hungry or thirsty (7:16a)
3. They will not suffer the heat of the sun by day (7:16b)
4. The Lamb on the throne will be their shepherd and will lead them to springs of living water (7:17a), and
5. God will wipe away every tear from their eye (7:17b)

In chapter 4 we see the elders casting down their crowns before Jesus, as well. So, it seems that those who have died in Christ go to be with Jesus, they stay right by His throne, have all their needs met, do not suffer, drink from living water and have God’s immediate comfort.

**Powerpoint:** Biblical Land of the Dead: Sheol

-Samuel's spirit returns (1 Samuel 28)

Now, it seems that it is possible for dead people to come back to earth. There are a couple of ghost stories in the Bible. Deep in the Old Testament, in 1 Samuel 28, there is this strange story of when King Saul pays a medium of Endor to call up the spirit of the dead prophet Samuel. And she does! Samuel, it says, comes up from the ground and demands of Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up." In answer to Saul's quandary, Samuel then continues his prophetic role and foretells Saul that he and Jonathan would both die the following day. And, of course, they did. So this is a real seance, and Samuel was called back by satanic power. But it was God who allowed this, for by God's hand the dead prophet continued to deliver God's message to Saul of his coming death.

**Powerpoint:** Biblical Land of the Dead: Sheol

- Samuel's spirit returns (1 Samuel 28)
- Moses and Elijah visit w/Jesus (Luke 9)

The other story of dead people appearing on earth comes in the New Testament when Jesus is transfigured. The story is in Luke 9. When Jesus temporarily basks in His divine glory, the disciples look up and see Moses and Elisha standing there, talking with Him. Now, Elisha never did die in the Bible, but Moses certainly did.

In both of these stories, it doesn't seem that the people had bodies, but were present in spirit form, or in the form of their disembodied souls. Where they were residing, we don't know, because this was before Jesus' resurrection and ascension. But it doesn't seem that Samuel was in any kind of agony or misery, because he complains that Saul disturbed him. Also, these two stories are not really ghost stories, instead they are stories of miracles, for in both cases, it was God who allowed these appearances for a very specific purpose.

**Powerpoint:** Biblical Land of the Dead: Sheol

- Samuel's spirit returns (1 Samuel 28)
- Moses and Elijah visit w/Jesus (Luke 9)
- Similar to Greek image of Hades

Since these are both before Christ's resurrection, it could be that they were somewhere else. The Old Testament talks a lot about Sheol, a vague, grey place where souls went after death. Revelation 20 says that when Christ comes back, Hades gives up its dead, wherever that is. And in Jesus' parable of the binding of the strong man, Jesus hints that after He died and before He was raised, He went down to hell and unlocked those prison doors. But all that is very sketchy and vague.

**Powerpoint:** Dead saints on earth?

There is also a passage that seem to suggest that dead saints have some presence on earth. It comes in the first verse of Hebrews 12. In the previous chapter, the author lists many of the Old Testament figures of faith. He says how they lived by faith and by faith saw the future glory God was bringing in. And then, beginning chapter 12, he says that all these saints who have gone on before, actually surround the Christian who is now trying to live faithfully. It says, "...we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses..." (12:1a). It doesn't say if this surrounding is figurative or literal, or if there is any physical qualities to it. Either way, it is in that great cloud of witnesses that we stand today here on All Saints Sunday.

**Powerpoint:** Dead saints on earth?

-Hebrews 12:1 “Great cloud of witnesses”

There is a lot about the saints we don't know. But what we do know, is that the saints who have died in Christ are not dead, but alive. Their bodies have been given back to the earth, and their souls await new bodies. They have gone to be with Jesus, who is at God's right hand. They are at rest, and they are at peace. They lack nothing, do not suffer, drink from living water and have God's immediate comfort. And in some way they surround us still here in this life as a great cloud of witnesses, encouraging us to live out our Christian lives faithfully.

**Powerpoint:** What It's Like after You Die?

- Not dead, but alive
- Souls await new bodies
- Are with Jesus in glory
- Are at rest and peace
- Lack nothing
- Do not suffer
- Are part of the “great cloud of witnesses”

So on this All Saints Sunday, we give God thanks for the saints who have gone on before. We remember them and honor them. But we treat them not as dead, but as alive. Alive, and a cloud of witnesses to us. The best way to honor them is to live out our lives as faithfully as they encourage us to be. As it says in Hebrews 12:1 “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:1-3).

Amen.