# We are Deeply Connected Across Space and Time

*Homily by Lisa Wiens Heinsohn for the people of St. John's Episcopal Church*
*The Feast of All Saints, November 2, 2025; Luke 6:20-31*

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, which actually occurred yesterday, every November 1. All over the world people remember those who have gone before us, our ancestors physically and spiritually. Those of Mexican and Hispanic heritage celebrate Dia de los Muertos, the Day of the Dead, which I know Rex and Linda and many others celebrated yesterday with our friends at Casa Maria. This day is exactly halfway between the Fall Equinox and the Winter Solstice and marks the beginning of the darkest quarter of the year. And interestingly, in the older, pre-Christian earth-based spirituality of Celtic Europe, there was a holiday called Samhain still celebrated by some today, when it was believed that the veils between the worlds were thin, and it was easier to sense the presence of the ancestors and the unseen world.

Now in the Episcopal Church we talk about the "communion of saints"---you'll hear that mentioned later in the service today in the Nicene Creed that we say on the first Sunday of the month here at St. John's when we do our traditional service. That doesn't just mean honoring our ancestors. It means that in some real and powerful way, they are still with us. Of course they are literally still with us in our very DNA, in our bones and blood and sinew. And their legacy impacts us. But the word "saint" also means you and I, every member of the body of Christ, not just the heroes of the faith that the Church has canonized. So that past and present, the "communion of saints" refers to the bonds of togetherness that link us with every other member of the body of Christ alive today and stretching back over the centuries to Jesus.

This is fairly alien to modern sensibilities, especially in the United States. In our culture here we have highly valued individuality, an almost hyper-individualism that promotes self-reliance and success and self-expression and originality and uniqueness. And those values aren't bad. But they aren't balanced, either. Science teaches us how hyper-connected we in fact all are. How the species all live together in a finely tuned, highly interactive web of interconnection in every ecosystem. Chaos theory teaches us that every little thing that happens has a ripple effect on everything and everyone else. Nothing we do happens in a vacuum. The reality that both science

and theology teach us, from different angles, is that we are deeply connected both to the concrete world we can see and hear and touch, and also to things we cannot see but that impact us nonetheless, whether that is the wings of a butterfly flapping across the ocean that ends up creating a storm system over the Midwest, or the strange world of quantum physics, or germs that make us sick, or the presence of the ancestors and our siblings in faith all over the globe across space and time.

In today's gospel reading Jesus talks about what it is to be blessed. Jesus' teachings are in stark contrast to the prevailing norms in this culture. Jesus is not promoting a culture of hyper-individualism or success. He is promoting the value of humility and taking the long view. He says that we are blessed when we are poor, when we mourn, when we are reviled for his sake, as many of our spiritual ancestors were. He tells us not to hate our enemies but to love them. That we should do to others what we want them to do to us. Embedded in this teaching is an insistence on empathy. To consider what I would want, and then project it on an enemy, is to imagine that enemy as an equal like me. It is to consider that person's welfare as important. It is to acknowledge that perhaps there is someone who considers me an enemy. How do I want them to treat me?

So you see, in this feast of All Saints, we are acknowledging how deeply interconnected we all are, both to everyone currently alive, and also to our ancestors who came before us and even those who will come after us, to seven generations as the Mdewakanton Dakota say. In Jesus' teachings from today's gospel reading he says we are blessed when we mourn because we will laugh, and also woe to us when we laugh because we will mourn. He is naming the vast expanse of human experience, that it does include both deep sorrow and also humor and joy, and urging us not to get too attached to the experience of any one moment, because it will soon change like Minnesota weather.

Yesterday a group of us from St. John's went to Hocokata Ti, a cultural center in Shakopee for the Mdewakanton Dakota people that deeply explores their culture, history, values and lifeways. I highly recommend it, especially to get a guided tour from one of their excellent staff who are extremely knowledgeable about this subject. The Mdewakanton Dakota people deeply honor their ancestors and are also mindful of their impact on the seven generations to follow us. The teachings of Jesus sound more like the values I heard about in yesterday's tour than like many of the values that are present in U.S. culture today. During times like these, when the prevailing winds in our country are so deeply troubling, it is more important than ever to hold fast to the teachings of Jesus about love and humility and service and resistance to hatred, to

acknowledge the importance of the communion of saints, of who and what we belong to, which is greater and larger and older than today's news. In the reading from the prophet Daniel you heard a little while ago, Daniel has a troubling dream about four terrifying beasts who arise out of the sea, four beasts who are kings on the earth. But he is told that the holy ones of the Most High, and not the beastly kings, shall receive and possess the kingdom forever and ever. That no matter who has power as this world measures power, that there is a deeper spiritual reality, the realm of God, where we belong and that cannot be taken from us. In the reading from Ephesians it says that Christ, who in his lifetime had zero success as this world measures success, nevertheless has been exalted far above every power and ruler on this earth. As they like to say at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Sunfish Lake, "Jesus is Lord, and Herod is not." It is as true for us to hear and know this teaching today as it was for the Hebrew people for whom the prophet Daniel was writing, or the early Christians in the time of the Roman empire for whom the letter to the Ephesians was written.

Today we have a wonderful group of people joining St. John's as members: Korbi Luttrell, Elizabeth, Nickolas & Isla Nieting, Elizabeth, John, Ben and Hazel Haugen, Emily, Scott, Georgia and Theo McPherson, Tom and Pat Wright, Darius Jazayeri, Monica Campo, and Lorenzo Jazayeri Campo, and Rebecca Cafferata. They probably thought they were just joining a local church. But here at St. John's we are explicitly acknowledging our deep interconnection with all life, with the ancestors and our descendants too. We are connected with the body of Christ across space and time, and we are deeply connected also with trees and animals and rocks and galaxies. We cannot ever be alone. And we do not need to allow the troubles of our current political situation to shake us from taking the long view: that we have in Christ a teacher and healer and prophet and brother who is with us still, who shows us the power of love and caring and justice. We have the great cloud of witnesses, those invisible heroes and ordinary ancestors of the faith who in some mysterious way are with us still, offering their example and love and support. We can recognize the deep timeless truths of our tradition which connect with the deep truths of other traditions because they all arise from the same Source, the Creator who made us all. And we can insist on trying to live in a way that leaves this earth better than we found it, whether that's Dick Howard managing a forest in Wisconsin that helps him have a net positive carbon impact on the planet, or Allen Gooch who rode his bike to Wild Church yesterday in the cold, or this beautiful community getting ready to install solar panels on our church roof, or all the families who gather on Wednesday night to do life and faith together, not alone. The Feast of All Saints teaches us to look backward and forward, to take the long view, to acknowledge that each one of us makes a difference and that we do it together, with God's help. Amen.