

All the Saints, Near and Far

All Saints this year is marked by personal grief at the news of three deaths in my family. The one that strikes me hardest is the death of Lauren's grandmother, Janet Calcutt. To be honest, I feel kind of strange about this, because I also learned yesterday morning that my father's two brothers also died recently, and Janet's death is the one that's causing me the most grief.

I share this because it's so hard to talk about these kinds of losses in everyday life, but we make space for it in the Church year during observations of All Saints Day and All Saints Sunday. The ability to speak what feels so unspeakable; to make real what can feel so hurtful and weird to acknowledge; to embrace as our lived experience the paradox of sorrow in loss, but the instruction to find joy in God's promised resurrection, sit in such a strained juxtaposition with the reality that life and the world didn't even move on from our own personal tragedies, but have the nerve to be completely agnostic to world-stopping personal events without pausing for breath.

All Saints is such an important time in the Church year because it allows us to sit in place with our feelings, whether it's the weight of grief, the lightness of relief, or even both, and speak aloud what we so frequently hold too close for even our own eyes to see.

I spoke with my cousin last night for the first time in quite a while, and when he asked how I was feeling, my response was, "weird". He laughed and said something along the same lines because some family relationships are challenging, and there's no single answer that covers it. All Saints is a time in our liturgical year that covers weird as well as it does weeping.

One more piece of what makes this such a powerful time of year for me is the knowledge that it's not just happening at St. John, or in Lutheran congregations. It's not a cultural thing. It's a benefit of being part of the body of Christ to know that people all over the world are sitting in this space with us. More, knowing that our belief in the Communion of Saints instructs us that we commune and worship with the entirety of the Church past, present, and future, we sit in this space with *all* the saints to make space for what the world too frequently chooses to ignore.

As I sit with this, I realize it's all still so messy in my heart. I also feel a strong gratitude that the Church is a family that knows how to deal with messes of the heart.

Grace & Peace,
Pastor Eric