

“With Humble Grace” – Nov. 5, 2023

All Saints Sunday

1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Heb. 12: 1-2)

Forrest Gump died and went to Heaven. He met St. Peter at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter said, “Well, Forrest, it’s good to see you. We have heard so many good things about you. Still, you need to pass an entrance quiz to get into Heaven.”

Forrest said, “St. Peter, nobody ever told me about an entrance quiz. I hope the tests aren’t too hard; Life was a big enough test as it was.”

St. Peter went on, “I understand, Forrest, but the quizzes are only three questions. The first quiz is: What days of the week begin with the letter T?” After thinking for a while, Forest answered: “Phew, that’s easy one. That should be Today and Tomorrow.”

St. Peter said, “Forrest! That's not what I was thinking, but I guess I didn’t specify, so I will give you credit for that answer.”

St. Peter gave Forest the second question: “How many seconds are there in a year?”

Forrest said, “That one is harder. Let me think about it.” Finally, Forrest answered, “I thought and thought about that and I guess the only answer should be twelve.”

Astounded, St. Peter said, “Twelve seconds!?! Forrest, how on earth can you think there are only 12 seconds in a year?”

Forest said, “St. Peter, I will count them: January second, February second, March second, April second...”

“Hold it” interrupted St. Peter. “I see where you’re going with it. I guess I see your point, though that wasn’t quite what I had in mind, but I’ll give you credit for that too.”

My final question is “What is God’s first name?”

Forrest replied, “Andy.”

St. Peter asked how on earth he came up with the name Andy, and Forrest answered, “You know, St. Peter, that song we sing in church: “Andy walks with me, Andy talks

with me. Andy tells me I am his own.” [In the Garden (United Methodist Hymnal #314)] Laughing out loud, St. Peter said to him: “Forrest, you deserve to get into heaven. Come on in!”¹

Today is All Saints’ Sunday. All Saints’ falls on November 1 or the first Sunday in November. It is a day of remembrance for the saints. As early as the second century, the early Christians wanted to honor and commemorate the Martyrs whose names were unknown. They began to observe the anniversary of the death of local heroes and heroines of the faith and the observance eventually became what we call All Saints’ Day.²

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, often preached on All Saints’ Day, calling it “a day of triumphant joy.” For Wesley, All Saints’ Day reminds us that “Christian faith is a gift that is passed on from generation to generation. It reminds us that we stand on the shoulders of all those faithful witnesses who have gone before us; the living and the dead.”³ In a journal entry from November 1, 1767, Wesley calls it “a festival I truly love.”

Do you know any saints?

I am not talking about saints declared and canonized by the Catholic or other churches. In the New Testament, saints are all Christian people of every time and place (for example, Acts 9:13, 41; 26:10; Rom 1:7; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; 3:8). Both past and present. Living and deceased. With this renewed understanding of saints, All Saints’ Day has been rapidly spreading among Protestants.⁴

Do you know any saints? Now you can answer “I do.” Our parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, or neighbors are saints and God’s beloved children who are living in God’s present and eternal care. We sing the hymn, “When we are living, it is in Christ Jesus, and when we’re dying, it is in the Lord. Both in our living and in our dying, we belong to God! We belong to God!” (UMH 356) We are all saints, not because we are perfect but because we are forgiven.

In Korean congregations, all parishioners are called Saints (성도님 *Seongdonim*): they call each other saints often without thinking about it in depth. When we call each other saints we can’t ignore or discriminate, but only appreciate one another. In any congregation, when each and every one is welcomed, accepted, and nurtured as God’s

¹ Author Unknown (revised)

² *UM Book of Worship*, James White, *History of Christian Worship*.

³ *All Saints Day & John Wesley* (Discipleship Ministries)

⁴ *New Handbook of the Christian Year*.

beloved child and saint, the common language of the congregation becomes mutual respect, understanding, and love. Did you know that you are all saints in God's loving heart and eyes?

On All Saints' Day, we also celebrate and remember those who served and still serve in view and behind the scenes. In most cases, especially in God's eyes, people who serve behind the scenes are the humble gems of the church. On All Saints' Day, however, we don't "dwell on the virtue of the saints but on the love of Christ who works in people throughout time."⁵

Today's reading reminds us that "a cloud of witnesses" – that is, a great crowd of martyrs and fellow Christians, living and deceased – are cheering us as we make progress in our journey of faith "looking to Jesus," the risen Christ. We are also called to cheer each other as we run the race with faith, humble mind, and perseverance, especially in Swift Memorial and also with neighbors near and far.

Let me share the story of a saint who served the church and the community with a humble heart.

Charlie Harris: a long time member of Church of All Nations in Boston. Humble, quiet, a behind the scenes person from a family of 17 children. He died at age 76 of cancer. All his life he served quietly at Church of All Nations. He just showed up on Wednesdays when the church members needed help unloading the food for the homeless meal program. He helped, then went back home ... no praise or acclaim wanted.

He also came every Monday before the AA meeting, not only to open the church, but he always brought food for the attendees, made coffee, and always brought a bouquet of flowers for the coffee/food table. He was a quiet, gentle servant spending his little money and all his time making sure those in need had encouragement, food, help, and support.⁶

Richard Garland, my friend and a retired UM clergyperson who wrote over 90 hymns, wrote the hymn 'With Humble Grace' for the memorial service of Charlie.

Let me read the lyrics of the hymn, "With Humble Grace (A Hymn of Remembrance for All Who Quietly Serve)":

1. With humble grace, they served their Lord: In quietness their God adored. They welcomed all those who had need. Their service was the loving deed.

⁵ White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*.

⁶ *With Humble Grace* (UM Discipleship-adapted)

2. Behind the scenes they worked and shared to show the least that people cared. With little things, done without praise, their lives became a hymn of praise.
3. Come, Spirit, come, with healing grace: with righteousness redeem this place, and comfort all who this day mourn. In Christ, the faithful are reborn!

Richard, the composer, said: “It occurred to me that our churches are filled with Charlie Harrises, quiet unassuming people who work behind the scenes, not expecting any reward save the satisfaction of fulfilling Jesus’ assessment, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’”

Do you know any saints? I do. We are all saints in God’s eyes and in God’s loving heart. As we sing together the hymn ‘With Humble Grace,’ I will light three candles, inviting you to light candles in your hearts, remembering a saint or saints living and dead who are and will be always living in God’s eternal presence.

Now, please join me to sing ‘With Humble Grace.’