"Where Hope Leads Us"
November 1, 2026

Isaiah 25:6-9
Romans 14:7-9

The prophet Isaiah encourages us on this All Saints Sunday: "Let us rejoice and be glad in God's salvation."

That is the fitting response to the promise that God will "swallow up death forever," "wipe away the tears from all faces," and take away the disgrace of God's people. We, the living, look forward to God's "salvation"—the wholeness and fullness of life that we seek. We anticipate that time of great gladness.

Such rejoicing is the fitting way to remember those who have died, because when we remember in the church we look ahead. We recall our hope, the hope in which others have lived and died—the hope of the resurrection. And hope does not disappoint.

In these days, hope commends itself to us—not because all is sunny, but because hope offers to a kind of courage in the face of all that threatens, all that destroys.

In what might be called a liturgical act of defiance toward the darkness of the season and the darkness of these days in our nation and our world and the darkness of death, we put out our white paraments with their sparkling gold designs. And we put a little swing into our music to remind that even in our grief and sorrow and foreboding, there is a hope that causes us to tap our feet a little.

It is good to rejoice and be glad. Sometimes we need some help with that.

Sometimes, by the grace of God that comes in so many ways, we receive that help.

I hope your hearts were cheered in some way by any costumed children at your door last night. Maybe you dressed up a little—or a lot—as well and cheered others.

Halloween, after all, is a Christian occasion. On Halloween we mock evil rather than acquiesce to its control over our lives and our world. Devils and dragons show up at our doors and we find that we can handle it. Of course, it's also nice when a princess or a knight shows up.

All Hallows Eve helps us to look beyond the current shadows toward the dawning of God's new day, God's salvation, so that we might rejoice.

We are cheered so that we might continue the work already begun as we look in hope toward

an end to sorrow—the wiping away of tears;

an end to shame—the removing of indignities from the people;

an end even to *the end*—the destruction of death.

This morning we mark All Saints Sunday according to our tradition with all the improvisations and surprises of jazz—echoing all of the improvisations and surprises of life. And we join together in

the joyful feast of the people of God, breaking the bread of life, receiving the cup of wholeness, with "all the saints on earth and saints at rest,' as we sing in one hymn.

As Protestants we recognize that the word *saint* applies to all who follow in the way of Jesus Christ—the living and the dead. In faith we recognize that in Christ there is an "enduring communion between the living and the dead."[i] The world tells us that a chasm is fixed between the living and the dead. We affirm that there is a bond that death does not destroy.

In that faith, we remember in particular our connections with Bob Ashman, Richard Bloesch, Del Brown, Ann Romanowski, Bob Stein, and a friend of this congregation, Larry Koepnick. Doing so, even in sorrow, we find our hearts are cheered.

They all loved family and friends, loved this life and this world. In living and in dying, they showed us how to live in hope. We remember them, we remember others dear to us and give thanks for their lives that we might find joy in our own living and dying.

In our loss and in our grief—whether it is fresh or has stayed with us for many years—we hear the good news that whether we live or whether we die, we belong to God. That simple statement has profound implications.

It is, first of all, an affirmation that this life is a supremely good gift from a loving God. Having created us, God is with us continually. This life is not an isolated moment; it is a relationship with the One to whom we belong, a relationship that surpasses the temporal boundaries of living and dying. We don't know what that might look like. But we know this: We are not our own. We belong to God and are held in God's eternal care.

And this means that the message of this day is not simply about those who have died or even about us in our own living and in what will be our dying.

The good news of this day is that God is with us in all the difficulties and demands of this life. God is with us in all the challenges we take on.

> In all the defeats and setbacks we experience, God still calls us forward.
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> In all our failures and outright sinfulness, God still offers forgiveness and the very real chance to begin anew.
>
> In our sorrow, God is with us, comforting us with a peace beyond understanding.

And yes, God will be with us in our dying as God was with Bob and Richard and Del and Ann and Bob and Larry in theirs, as God was with all those whom you and I remember in our hearts this morning.

If we call them "saints," it is not because they lived perfect or even exemplary lives—although there is much in each of their lives that we might want to imitate.

They are "saints" because they engaged fully in life with all its possibilities and challenges, taking life as it came to them. They failed and succeeded, they hurt and they healed.

They rest from their labors. And yet, in a sense, their work is not done. Everyone leaves behind some unfinished business—for as Reinhold Niebuhr famously said: "Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore, we must be saved by hope."[ii]

The hope that saves us is the hope that our work for the good will be taken up by others who can see the flaws and good better than we can and who will, with the forgiveness of another age continue toward the goal, running the race with perseverance.

It is time once more to recover hope in a world that can seem hopeless.

It is time to recover hope in society that can create so much despair.

Hope asks the question: "What kind of future are we building for ourselves?"[iii] In other words, hope is not about positive thinking or wishing hard that something might happen.

Hope asks about what we are *doing*.

So, the question comes to each of us as individuals and all of us as a congregation: What kind of future are we building? What action can we take—even today—to bring us closer to our desires? What harvest do we want to gather?

Yes, fall brings decay. Leaves drop, grass stops growing. But even now it is possible to look ahead with hope to something new, something hidden now that is yet to be revealed. It's not too late—not too late in the year even as November arrives to plant spring bulbs.

The one who sees something more gets out and digs in the soil, puts in bone meal, and covers the bulbs with dirt and leaves. As Howard Thurman put it: "Fall accentuates the goodness of life and finds its truest meaning in the . . . breath of spring."

What are you planting in these bleak days?

What is the hope of God's wholeness leading you to *do*?

It is the vision of what *can be* in the future that empowers us to act in the present. In hope we defy the hatred and the death that is still so apparent.

Hope is tenacious, enduring—it lives with promises deferred in the conviction that even death does not end God's love and God's faithfulness.

Because we hope, we act. We act even if our work and the work of those who came before us is never really finished. We work for justice: that the hungry are fed and the homeless are sheltered and deep wounds of racism and sexism, of anti-Semitism and homophobia are healed for the sake of God's love revealed in Jesus Christ.

And if in do such things we are successful in making clear that we worship and serve a living God, by the grace of that God our children and their children will continue running the race set before them and us, knowing that they, too, are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses—all of us looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

We belong to God.

Be of good cheer.

Rejoice and be glad in the hope of God's salvation.

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[i] . Moltmann, quoted in Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, pg. 109.
[ii] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Irony of American History*

[iii] Kennon Callahan, ‘Hope,” in *Twelve Keys for Living*