

“Held in God’s Love”
November 2, 2025

Romans 8:18-25
Hebrews 12:1-3

It’s always a joy to welcome back our friends Dick, Lynn, Gary, and Craig. In providing the music for this Sunday, they show us something about the Christian life. In a very real sense, the Christian life is a jazz life, a life of improvisation.

We start with the basic theme—God’s love for us and for all creation revealed through the Hebrew Scriptures and shown in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—and then we go off on various riffs and improvisations on that theme. By our actions, we expand and expound on God’s love. Using the past while never being bound to it, we explore our understanding of just who this Jesus is—and who we are, as those who follow in his way. We discover new variations in our own lives—and then we come back to that original theme of God’s love for us and all creation. Each generation, each life adds its own beautiful interpretation.

We have heard such wonderful music in so many different lives!

On All Saints Sunday we open our ears and our eyes and our hearts and recognize that we are faithful people, not in isolation but in community. By the grace and mercy of the living God, that community extends not only in space but also through time. We are united in faith and struggle with those who came before us just as we are united with those who come after us.

Because of this, we recognize that the word *saint* applies to all who follow in the way of Jesus Christ—the living and the dead. And in faith we recognize that there is an “enduring communion between the living and the dead in Christ.”¹

It is a religious sensibility—this awareness of a cloud of witnesses round about us. The world tells us that a chasm is fixed between the living and the dead. In faith we speak of the communion of the saints, of being surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. In faith we affirm that we share a bond that death does not destroy.

This morning, we remember in particular Deb Cobb along with two good friends of our congregation, Tom Kinney and Richard Wells. We give thanks for their lives because in their time and in their way, they joined with us and with others in seeking to make this world a little more like God’s just and loving and merciful realm. We give thanks that their lives were a part of our lives. And, no doubt, on this day you are also remembering and giving thanks for many others—that great cloud of witnesses—whose lives have touched and shaped your own life.

Christians in an earlier age affirmed: "In life and in death we belong to God." It is a simple statement, but one with profound implications. It is, first of all, an affirmation that life is a supremely good gift from a loving God who, having created us, 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.

These words offer immense comfort: we are not alone; together, we belong to and belong with God.

In a world of increasing nihilism, these words also invite us to affirm that there is purpose in living. “We are not our own . . . we are God's.” Our own immediate fears and needs, our own opportunities and options are not the boundaries of our existence. Each of our lives has a larger context of relationships, and we are responsible to those relationships—including our relationship with God—as long as life endures. Even through illness and the process of dying, we are not our own: our lives are held in God’s eternal care.

We remember the “saints” of God, not because we worship the dead or the past, but because they serve as reminders to us of the God who not only was but is active in ordinary lives—like theirs and like ours.

Even now, with all the struggles of living, we recognize that we move from despair to joy, from paralysis to action, from sickness to health, from death to life. In hope we have the eyes of faith giving us the vision that even when the leaves in their brilliant splendor fall to the ground against the November skies, we are *Easter* people. We live with the empowering awareness that in Christ God has conquered death and the sin that separates us from God, from one another, and from the best in ourselves.

It is with the eyes of our hearts enlightened that we can speak with joy today of the saints of God—people like you and me, who in the words of a hymn “toiled and fought and lived and died for the Lord they loved and knew.”

The brilliant light of their living and their dying gave glory to God. The more they were themselves, the more we are ourselves, the more God becomes known in this world.

While we remember those lives with a deep sense of gratitude, this is more than a day of remembrance. On this day we look forward with hope.

Hope always has a future orientation. The danger in speaking about “hope” on All Saints Sunday is that we will hear the word in the context of remembering those who have died and we will start to think about something called “going to heaven.”

But the Christian hope as we encounter it in scripture really has less to do with where we are going after the death that comes to each of us as it has to do with the New Creation that God is in the process of making. The hope is both that we *are* a part of this new creation and that we *will be* a part of it as God’s future unfolds.

Such a hope does not brush the sorrow or the suffering of life aside. It takes our sadness and grief seriously and speaks of a future that God is even now bringing into being. Out of such hope, we can face our own sadness and the suffering of the world.

This morning, we heard Paul commending to us a *religious* hope, one that grows out of a sense that our lives—however brief or long, however filled with sadness or happiness, however wealthy or impoverished—our lives are lived in the presence of God who breathes the breath of

life into each of us and all of us. *Religious* hope trusts that God’s new day is dawning even as the world and our lives are surrounded by so many shadows.

Now, we should not confuse hope with the wishful thinking expressed when we say something like: “I hope it won’t rain this afternoon.” when we have no control over the weather whatsoever.

Instead, as one person put it, “Hope is the bird that sees the light and sings while dawn is still dark.”

Such a hope is so strong that Paul can claim, “In hope we are saved”—not that we have become part of some insiders’ club, but that we find the wholeness of life, the purpose that we seek as we live in the presence of God.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks suggests that a meaningful life involves easing the pain of those who suffer and becoming an agent of hope in the world.² How this looks in particular will vary immensely. The meaning of my life will be different from yours. The meaning of your life will be different from that of your neighbor.

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

Some would say that this is just empty religious talk. My own sense is that we are confronted here with a central reality of the Christian life—the power of the resurrection.

The power of the resurrection is the ability to act because in the resurrection we come to believe that even though this world can at times seem so obviously filled with such evil and injustice, as others have affirmed, the arc of the universe is long but that it moves toward justice. We can truly act “in faith,” that is, trusting that the ultimate direction of creation is toward God’s good purposes for all of life.

The power of the resurrection comes not through our own positive thinking or by our strenuous efforts. This power arises out of God’s vindication of the suffering and death of Jesus in the resurrection, in which we see by faith that even at the moment of great suffering and death, God was at work bringing life—and by that same faith claiming that God continues to bring life out of death, hope out of despair today. This is the power that sets us free to love with abandon, to act even when fear presses in, to draw out the best in ourselves and other people.

This is the power that fuels our improvisation as, in so many different ways, we affirm the good news that we are—at all times—held in God’s love.

¹ . Moltmann, quoted in Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World*, pg. 109.

² *The Great Partnership*, pg. 205.