

All Saints Sunday, 2008
Good Hope Lutheran Church

To me, All Saints Sunday is like celebrating Easter in autumn. Easter is nice in the spring, of course—trees are beginning to bud out, the flowers are all starting to bloom—and Easter fits right in with that. Talking about new life in Christ, it seems to make sense in the spring of the year. It seems very out of place in the fall, when the world around us is growing cold, and quietly dying. Easter doesn't seem to fit that picture at all—which, you see, is why we need it now. It's why All Saints Day is so very important, it's Easter in autumn—a chance to be reminded of the new and eternal life which is ours in Christ, when we and the world need it most.

The Lord be with you. Let's pray:

Blessed are you o Lord our God, maker of heaven and earth. In the beginning you created us and all living things, and in these last days you have saved us by the gift of your Son. We thank you for this day, for Easter in autumn! And we pray for the gift of new life in Christ that begins now, and by your mercy continues after our deaths, in a kingdom that has no end. Blessed are you o Lord our God, our maker and redeemer and friend; in Jesus' name we pray, AMEN.

As a festival on the Christian calendar, All Saints Sunday had its beginnings, in the fear long ago people felt in the face of death. Fifteen hundred years ago, give or take a century or two, parts of France as well as most of the British Isles—were NOT Christian. People there worshipped the so-called gods of nature—the rivers the forests, the sun the sky—nature and its cycles, was all they knew. Well, that works for a while I suppose, but such a faith offered very little as to Why am I here? And it had no answer at all to the question, What happens to me, when I die?

These long ago people were afraid of what they didn't understand, they were afraid of death, so every autumn would have a religious festival, to try to make sure the dead weren't somehow angry with the living. They'd put food outside, and lock themselves inside, and hope the dead would take the goodies and leave—you see by the way, where we get Trick or Treating? Hmm? Only they thought it was real, and were afraid.

Well, along came the Christian missionaries who said Look. God is not nature. God *made* nature, and God made you. And God has a plan for you, and your life right now, God has a promise of life forever in His presence, in heaven! Death happens to people in this world of time, but we don't need to be terrified. Death happens, but we don't have to leave food on the front porch and hope for the best. Death happens, but God lives, God loves, and God will not let you

go. God has a plan for you now and a home for you forever, come, let's change this "festival" of yours. Instead of being ignorant and afraid, said these Christian missionaries, let's rejoice in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let's celebrate Easter in autumn! Let's remember the story of Jesus, who died and rose again, and in the face of death and despair let's cling to hope: God lives, God loves, God will not let us go.

1500 years ago the Christian missionaries took that old religious festival, and gave us All Saints Day, Easter in autumn. Now today, what goes around comes around, and we again find ourselves in a world where the Christian faith, may be a "minority opinion." A new kind of false religion has emerged, in which people worship money, and tremble at the rise and fall of stock markets. People worship youth, and beauty, and fight every wrinkle and pluck every gray hair, and secretly dread the brevity of life. People worship comfort, and ease, and balk at anything that sounds like it takes effort, or commitment, or generosity of spirit. Most of all, people worship that great false god Self, and would do anything to please Self, and would resist any inconvenience to Self—which makes dealing with each other kind of difficult, when everyone's in it for Self the world can quickly become a nasty sort of place. Maybe you've noticed that, in your home too. Worshipping Self makes life tough; it also makes it tough to come to terms with death—"how could *that* possibly happen, to me? What does it mean, that it will?" If Self is your god, then it's hard to find a meaning in life larger than consumerism, and it's impossible to find any hope in the face of death. Just like 1500 years ago: Those who cling to the false religion of Self find themselves increasingly isolated, and lonely, and afraid. There are many such people, today, including all the sinners I see here now, I think.

To which the Christian faith says, Look. You are not god. You are not god, you were *made* by God, and you were put here by God, for a reason! The reason is not to serve self, the reason is to serve each other, and by so doing to give glory to the God and Father of us all. You were put here by God, and what's more you were redeemed by Christ—Jesus Christ that is, the only Son of

God—the one who died to forgive you your petty, selfish, self-centered ways, and to open for you the way of eternal life. To love others, and to love God. To serve others, and to serve God. To die to self, to rise in and for Christ—that is the way of eternal life. That is the call and the challenge of each new day! And that is the hope we cling to, as we lift our eyes from the merely day to day, and look for a moment, toward our home in heaven.

Easter in autumn. The world may be slowly dying, and so much about me is petty, and mean, and vain, and it needs to die too. But our God lives, and God loves, and God will not let me go. God won't let you go either, and on this day He calls to you: Arise, and follow me, all the way, from death into life.

May we and all God's saints heed that call, and follow, unto life everlasting. In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.