

Honestly speaking, I find myself struggling personally every year around this time because it seems to be one of the most odd, confusing, awkward and superficial times of the year. Not only do I struggle to identify what season it is in as it seems to alternate between fall and winter each year, I seem to be battling emotionally, culturally, theologically, and spiritually. I seem to straddle the invisible line between joining in the all festivities that this season entails and then being indifferent about all of it the next. I still deal with the dilemma of “to trick or treat” or not. When popularity was riding on the back of the richness determined by how many buckets you can fill with candy and when the temptation of the sugar high is unbeatable, Halloween was fully celebrated. Then, being raised by parents who were rooted in the Pentecostal movement where the spiritual realm is just as alive and active as the world our naked eyes see, fear sets in. Then as I unashamedly wear the face with the culture immersed in a belief system formed by Confucius, Buddha, and Shamanism, which all stresses honoring the dead, pleasing and worshiping ancestors, and being mindful of evil spirits sending chills down my spine, there were years when I opted for locking the outside world out, refusing to buy anything triggering the festivities, and also willingly took on the role of babysitting in a classroom full of children grumbling because their families too opted them out of participating in their school’s Halloween parties and the famous parade around the playground.

Then there are those years when I just allowed myself to flow freely with the consumerist, secular society, gladly carving my happy face pumpkin, utilizing the opportunity to buy a ridiculously large bag of my favorite candies, proudly putting out my teal color pumpkin, and tirelessly walk the back and forth marathon from living room to door at every bell ring and shouts of trick or treat knowing obviously that these kids don’t really mean tricks or curses on my home for not giving them a treat... right?

There were also times I took advantage of the easy hospitality of people opening the door to all strangers one night of the year by leading a church wide “reverse trick or treat” going door to door giving them a bag of goodies with an invitation to the church.

I think it's safe to say that we here are among one of the many cultures who set aside time to honor or celebrate the dead such as Choseok or festival of the harvest in the South Korean Culture, Dia de los Muertos, Day of the dead in the Mexican culture, and Gai Jatra, the festival of the cow in Nepal. History suggests that the Celtic belief has the earliest evidence that ties all our current festivities here as they believed that the night before their new year, November 1, the line between the world of the living and the dead is blurred. Then there are our Catholic Brothers and sisters who take this time to pray for those in purgatory, the world between heaven and earth while remembering the saints who intercede their prayers. Then there are other beliefs that suggest that the spirits of the dead roam the living and reek havoc unless they are pleased in some way...

However, I found that the origins of all the festivities today of All Hallows Eve, Halloween, All Souls' Day, and All Saints' Day, point to why we are gathered here at church, “ALL SAINTS' Sunday”.

All this to say, I was surprised to read recently that the founder of the Methodist Movement, John Wesley was most fond of this high holy day, All Saints' Sunday, among all other High Holy Days such as Easter, Advent and Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, Lent and Ash Wednesday, Pentecost. He had written in several of his journal entries that All Saints' Day was his favorite “festival I truly love, I always find this a comfortable day, a day that I peculiarly love”. Could you take a guess to why he favored All Saints' Day?

The theological method of the four interrelated guidelines, or what we call the Quadrilateral we adopted from John Wesley taught us that Scripture, Experience, Reason, along with Tradition is the

source of our understanding of our faith. The United Methodist Church website explains that “by tradition, we mean all that has gone before us in the Christian church. We are part of a long history that goes back through John Wesley, to the early days of the church and the apostles of Jesus. When we think theologically, we need to keep in mind the creeds, prayers, sermons, books, music, and all other ways Christians have understood the work of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit in their lives.” John Wesley thought it was proper, right, and essential to acknowledge and to hold in high regard the tradition and all the saints, all those who had gone before who contributed to the church and the work of God in the world. His brother Charles Wesley caught John’s essence of respecting the saints that he wrote a hymn about it. However, he also cautioned against holding saints in too high regard, which was included in the Articles of Religion which he sent to the Methodist in America in 1784.

So what are we to do on All Saints’ Sunday as intended by John Wesley informed by the scriptures we read today in Ephesians and Hebrews? How about considering these three things today...

First, with honor and respect we Remember... As Apostle Paul reminds us in the Hebrews reading, we remember the great cloud of witnesses who are worshiping God in the heavenly realm. We remember them by reading their names aloud, we remember them in our hearts this morning, and we talk about them and all they were to us with our brothers and sisters here at church. And as Paul greeted the saints in Ephesus which indicates that saints are not just the faithful who have passed on, but those who are living who are faithful in Christ Jesus, we remember those among us and around us who show us what it means to be faithful to Jesus, our current Sunday School teachers, our grandparents, our parents, and even the children among us who inspire us to live more like Christ.

Secondly, with gratitude, we celebrate all they have done and what they left behind for us; all that we inherited from those who have been faithful and contributed to our faith formation; their examples, their stories, their teachings, their deeds, their words, works of art, the hymns, creeds,

prayers, books. We participate in practices passed down to us, partake in the rituals taught to us, and perform publicly and duly the responsibilities they entrusted to us. We sing the hymns, pray the prayers, read the scriptures, and partake in Holy Communion while we also go out into the world to tell others about the work God is doing, to teach our children, and to care for those in need.

Lastly, as we are inspired by the saints who showed us by example, we ASPIRE, not to be called saints but to live according to God's love shown to us by Jesus. As Hebrews 12 reminds us, to "run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus," we endure hardship, live in praise to God, share the gospel through all aspect of life, and share the story of God's salvation like the saints. Even if we don't live with the intent to be called saints, the truth is we inspire each other, children look up to us, and as we have promised at baptisms, we aim to be examples of God's grace, bearers of the Good news, embodiment of Christ in the world, and carriers of God's image within us.

So we find our last encouragement from Charles Wesley in the last verse of his hymn, "Come let us join our friends above."

"Our spirits too shall quickly join, like theirs with glory crowned, and shout to see our Captain's sign, to hear his trumpet sound. O that we now might grasp our Guide! O that the word were given! Come, Lord of Hosts, the waves divide, and land us all in heaven."

In following the example of the saints we remember who have gone before us and those among us who gave sacrificially for this church to be standing here today, we give thanks. We also celebrate by taking on that responsibility to give sacrificially and faithfully to the ministries of this church and recommit ourselves in aspiration to be Christlike in the world. And following tradition we also pass the red pew registers.