

**For All The Saints**  
**Revelation 7: 9-17; Hebrews 12: 1-3**  
**Don Lincoln**

It was November of 2004 – my fourth year here – when we first started reading names of those we had returned to God as part of our prayer on All Saint’s Sunday. And it has remained a holy privilege ever since. And as I have aged, and my emotional incontinence increases, it has become **BOTH** more difficult and more sacred to continue this practice. To do this for the last time in this congregation fills me with an overwhelming sense of gratitude and thanksgiving. I’ve read more than 400 names since 2004.

It was in 2019, four weeks after the death of my father, that I realized there might be no one calling out his name anywhere – because for the last two years of his life, even though he lived in Akron, Ohio, my dad worshipped with Westminster each Sunday.

He was no longer able to attend the church across the street from his apartment, so he joined us for worship. Thanks be to God we began live-streaming in 2017 – about the time he could no longer physically get to worship. He texted me each Sunday following worship. Short texts from his flip-phone. I miss his weekly encouragement.

So in 2019 we added within our prayer the opportunity for anyone to call out the name of someone who might not be formally associated with this congregation’s circle, but who we might individually appreciate the privilege of naming out loud before God on All Saints’.

So – we have called out names. And the promise of scripture is they are among the great throng who have finished their race. The image in Revelation describes a multitude of saints before the throne of God – more than can be counted, from every nation and tribe and language. And they are robed in white. Their garments are not white because they were extra gifted in the laundry department, or because they always stayed out of the dirt. They are made white by the washing of Christ.

They are in the crowd, not because of who they were, or what they did, but by what Christ has accomplished for them. Salvation is GOD’S work the text says – salvation belongs to God. And indeed it does, for it is Jesus who makes saints out of even us sinners. Everywhere in the Gospel, when other people saw sinners, Jesus saw citizens of God’s new kingdom.

Today you and I are reminded that despite the mix of good and evil in each of us, God can take the ordinary, even profane, and love them into holy usefulness. Ordinary, flat-footed, bumbling, morally compromised folks like you and me, like those we have named this day – all of us – from every tribe and nation – can be loved into sainthood.

In love, and in Christ, God redeems us and our sins. Renews us from the inside out. And because of that, you and I – living this life now – are freed to more and more become the saints God sees us being, who care about one another and the world as God cares about it.

One way God makes that happen is through the encouragement of those gone before us. That's why I love the image in the text from Hebrews.

We, the readers, are like runners who have entered the arena. Around us in the stands are the packed ranks of spectators. Don't picture out-of-shape fans, with a drink in one hand and with the other stuffing a hot dog in their mouth. These aren't just any old fans. These are those who with avid interest follow the course of the runners – a great cloud of witnesses. One meaning of that word is actually witness the facts – they're seeing it happen.

Because these are those who have already run; who have finished the race; who know the challenges of the hills, who know what it is like not being able to see around that next corner. These are the faithful in the arena, cheering US on. The ones who have received a witness from God, who having witnessed their own confession now witness ours in the making. And it's a vast throng, not a thin crowd. Rooting for us!

I played soccer in high school. My father made it to as many games as he could. I always knew when he had gotten there. I could hear his voice from the stands – "Way to go Don!" I never remember hearing him yell at me for missing a kick, or sending it out of bounds, or for getting beaten on the run by another player. It was always "Way to go, Don! Great kick. Good throw in. You can get it."

That's the image I have of this great cloud of witnesses who want nothing better than for us to finish the race and to finish it well. And if we had read the previous chapter in Hebrews, you would know who is in the stands cheering for us. Abraham and Sarah, and Moses. Really! Cheering for you and for me! And imagine who all the rest are. Deborah and David and Ruth; Mary and Joseph; Peter, James and John, Paul, Timothy, Priscilla. And Martin Luther; John Calvin; John Wesley; John Knox. Catherine of Siena and Fanny Crosby singing for all her might and Martin Luther King – all cheering.

Imagine all those folks shouting encouragement. All of them – and more – even my dad – cheering us on. Cheering you on. Cheering me on. Shouting encouragement as we who are still running the race head toward our own finish line – running in the footsteps of Jesus – the pioneer and perfecter – until the day arrives when there will be no more thirst, no more hunger, and God will wipe every tear from our eyes.

So friends, let us run. Let us run. May it be so. AMEN.