

***Celebrating the Saints***  
**Isaiah 25:6-9; John 11:32-44**

*All Saints' Day is November 1. That does not always fall on Sunday as it does this year. In contemporary understanding, it is a time to commemorate all Christian people of every time and place. "The saints" in New Testament usage refers to Christians collectively, and it is with this biblical understanding that celebration of this day has been rapidly spreading among Protestants. It is observed by many Protestant denominations that do not commemorate any individual designated as a saint.*

*Today we will celebrate the saints, those who have moved from this life into the more immediate presence of our Lord, and those who have had influence over our lives.*

When sportswriter Mitch Albom heard that his favorite college professor, whom he hadn't seen in 20 years, was dying of Lou Gehrig's disease, he began visiting with him weekly. In his bestselling book *Tuesday's with Morrie*, Albom describes their visits, focusing on his old professor's wit and insights.

One time, Mitch asked Morrie why he bothered following the news since he wouldn't be around to see how things turned out. Morrie responded, "It's hard to explain, Mitch. Now that I am suffering, I feel closer to people who suffer than I ever did before. The other night on TV, I saw people in Bosnia running across the street, getting fired on. I just cried and cried. I felt their anguish as if it were my own. I don't know any of these people. But- how can I put this? I'm almost drawn to them. "

This passage of John reminds us that Jesus understands our suffering, too, but it's more than empathy. Jesus has suffered and is with us when we suffer. I've tried many times to imagine how Jesus felt when he arrived at the home of his beloved friends, and learns of Lazarus' death. There have been times when I felt the urge, you know what I mean, when you knew you SHOULD go visit, when you thought you should call, but you waited too long. And, when you received word that they had moved into the more immediate presence of our Lord, you had regrets. Was that how Jesus felt? Did Jesus have regrets? We're his tears those of regret? Or were those tears of anger at those gathered around, who questioned Jesus' love for his beloved friend Lazarus?

Hear the words of the Prophet Isaiah again: But here on this mountain, God-of-the-Angel-Armies will throw a feast for all the people of the world; a feast of the finest foods, a feast with vintage wines, a feast of seven courses, a feast lavish with gourmet desserts. 7 And here on this mountain, God will banish the pall of doom hanging over all peoples, the shadow of doom darkening all nations. 8 Yes, he'll banish death forever. And God will wipe the tears from every face. He'll remove every sign of disgrace from his people, wherever they are. Yes! God says so! 9 Also at that time, people will say, "Look at what's happened! This is our God! We waited for him and he showed up and saved us! This God, the one we waited for! Let's celebrate, sing the joys of his salvation."

Today we are CELEBRATING the saints. We are CELEBRATING those whom God has placed in our lives to love, influence, guide, and direct. Without these saints, our lives would have been less - we would be less - and we celebrate that God allowed our lives to intersect with their lives and that now they are enjoying eternal life in the presence of the God who loves us all. Amen.