

All Saints' Sunday

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[Music Intro]

[Male voice] The following is a presentation of Artisan Church in Rochester, New York.

[Voice of Pastor Scott]

As I get started here I want to pass out some pipe cleaners. You know the sermon pipe cleaners, the usual. I'm just kidding this doesn't happen every time but I would like everybody to take two pipe cleaners. OK let's do like—and there's multiple colors here you can take those. Maybe pass those that way, thank you. I'll start here and if they don't get to you or if you don't get enough to get to for everybody to I think there's a lot left so I may just let them run about. I'll explain that later.

I don't know about you but this week has really affected me; I feel like I've said this so many times recently we've had a lot of bad weeks this year. And just the events of this week have left me feeling and I realize this during the first service that my primary emotion here is anger. I just feel angry at what has happened in our country this past week and I do feel sadness and grief but I realized during that social justice prayer in the first service that. That that's really been just kind of exhibiting itself primarily for me as anger and I think that may be true for some of you as well. And you know what the what the Saints of the Church tell us, particularly those who have experienced great suffering, is that it's not that anger is invalid or inappropriate but that if you are left with only your anger and you don't kind of put that into the container of a contemplative life and into a life of prayer that the anger will burn you up and burn you out. And I what I realise is that's what's been happening to me you know you can ask my family, I've probably been a little bit short fused lately. And I realized that this righteous anger, which when channeled correctly could hopefully direct me to taking actions that might improve the world has mostly been like burning up my goodness. And that's I think because if I've let go of my habit, such as it is, of contemplative prayer and so I offer that to you in case you are in the same boat. I don't know that you are, I know that some of you probably are but my commitment is to myself and to you is is that I'm going to regain that this week in some form or another. I'm going to revisit that commitment to contemplative prayer each day and maybe it's something that you would do with me if you- especially if you're feeling that anger starting to burn you up

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a little bit. Because you know you just kind of get fried and start to feel like you're spinning out and you just you don't know who to direct your anger out anymore and you just kind of upset.

So I have a pastoral prayer that I wrote before I came to that realization, fair warning, I think it still works. I'd like to pray for you and with you and on your behalf about the events of this past week would you join me in prayer.

God of mercy today we pray for those who have lost their lives to acts of domestic terrorism and racial violence. For the victims of a racially motivated shooting in Jeffersontown, Kentucky we pray. Comfort those who grieve, be the God of love in a community torn apart by hatred and bring true justice to the perpetrator of this terrible act. For those who lost their lives in the Tree of Life congregation synagogue in Pittsburgh we pray. God will you sit in mourning with this devastated community. May your presence with them be very real and very close and may your love protect them from further acts of anti-Semitism and violence. Forgive us, oh God, for our own complicity in perpetuating a culture of white supremacy. Forgive us for believing in the myth of redemptive violence. Forgive us for remaining silent when family members, friends, politicians and co-workers stoke the fires of hatred. Forgive us for making things worse when we do choose to speak. God conforme us into the image and likeness of your Son Jesus Christ whose only law was love. Whose life and death were the embodiment of love and who saves us and the whole world through his love. Strengthen us and embolden us, we pray. That we may carry this love with us wherever we go bringing it into our workplaces, our schools, our families. Into our voting booths and town hall meetings and our public policy. Even into our houses of worship where we still get so much wrong. May we be so consumed by your love that it overflows to others wherever we are. Grant, oh God, that your holy and life giving spirit may so move every human heart that barriers which divide us may crumble, suspicions disappear, and hatreds cease. That our divisions being healed we may live in justice and peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I also want to read a passage of Scripture from the prophet Isaiah. I thought that this would be a good place to turn given that a big part of the week's violence was focused toward our Jewish friends and neighbors. This is Isaiah 25 6-9:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow of well aged wines strained clear. And He will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples. The sheet that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever. And then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces and the disgrace of his people He will take away from all the earth. For the Lord has spoken "It will be said on that day: 'Lo this is our God. We have waited for Him so that He

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might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited. Let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.'"

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces. And the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth. And we see glimpses of that in our time. You know that text that I just read actually comes from the Lectionary passages that are assigned for today. It always amazes me how the words of scripture just taken from a table that was set up years and years ago can speak so incisively and directly to what's happening in the world around us. In this case we're actually using texts that are from Thursday which is kind of a weird thing we're using the text for "All Saints Day", which is usually observed on November first. Sometimes it's observed on the Sunday after but we moved it to the Sunday before for reasons that you don't care about. But for whatever reason this text came to us on this week with this particular type of violence against these spiritual relatives, you know? Sometimes I think of them as siblings or cousins or ancestors. But they're a comfort to me and provide hope to me and I hope to as well.

So we are observing All Saints Sunday this week. "All Saints Day" is a day when the Church celebrates all saints it's very complicated, stay with me. The way this works is that some Saints have a special day just for them. The Feast day of St. Patrick right is what March 17 and we all celebrate that with very holy activities, don't we? There's a feast day for lots of different saints but there's so many Saints that you can't have one each one of them have their own day because you'd run out of days in the year. So there's a day for All Saints it's kind of like Presidents Day, you know? We just put them all together and celebrate them there. Also called All Hallows day. The eve of which is Halloween evening or if you use the poetic form Hallowe'en, so Halloween or Hallowe'en is the night before All Saints Day. And you'll see where some of our observances come from when you know that Christian people used to get together with like and have these religious costume parties, which I know sounds very exciting and fun. And you just you want to tell your friends that you're going to a religious costume party but some of them would dress up as the saints of the Church and others of them would dress up as evil spirits and they would reenact this kind of cosmic spiritual battle. It was like a medieval Christian larping party.

[Laughter]

Anyway now we give out candy, which makes a lot more sense to me. And by the way we do do we do neighborhood trick or treating it's going to be Wednesday right here. What times start to get here? 5:30? Bring a few bucks for pizza if you want to go trick or treating with your kids if you have them or if you want to hang out with the Artisan kids, which is it's a hoot these neighborhoods are very good for that. We do that every year, we've been doing that for a long

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time. But that's Halloween, that's all Hallows Eve, those events the day before All Saints Day, which we're observing today seven days or five days really is what we're here to talk about today. And the funny thing about saints is that we all have different ways of defining who is one, don't we? You know some of you who grew up in a Roman Catholic Church or maybe still attend one on occasion and in the Roman Catholic Church a saint is very specifically someone who has attained heaven and because there's that kind of middle doctrine of purgatory in there somewhere that's that's actually more special than it might seem to us Protestants just think like you die and you know you're there with Jesus. But Protestants don't have that kind of whole set up so we just think of the saints as like the the really great people right now. Somebody this morning said like "I love All Saints Day because it reminds me of my grandmother, who was the greatest saint in my life" and I thought I was a really beautiful sentiment. But whatever our definition may be whether we have this formalized kind of canonization process that the Roman Catholic Church has or whether it's just I think of my grandma or anything in between, we all agree that a saint is someone who has done amazing things in the world or someone who's extremely holy, right? We could go with that generalized definition and everybody could buy into that. And of course Saints they have what? They have halos. So if you would be so kind if you have your pipe cleaners and are going to put them together twist them together and make a circle like like mine, right? Here and this this is going to be your halo. Can you picture me with a halo? [Laughter]

You don't have to answer quite so quickly. But you could hold it up to your own head and make yourself a saint or maybe if you feel like that's a bridge too far you can hold it up the person next to you. Just put it behind their head and kind of size them up and say "Are you a saint?". You know the halo or as Dave told me after the first service, the Nimbus is the art term for this, the halo shows up in sacred art throughout history. And I have a great example of this that I want to show to you and so we're going to put this on the screen and maybe I will put this on like Facebook or something too.



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But this is a mosaic that shows, on the left Theodora Episcopa, right? And she has some saints next to her so next to her are saints Praxedis and Pudentiana and then in the middle is Mary the Mother of Jesus. Now Theodora Episcopa you can see that inscription right above her head there. That is Greek for Theodora Bishop but the the ending on the word is a feminine ending and so you can see somebody much later tried to scratch it out and tried to erase the fact that there had been a female bishop because we know that we can't have female bishops, it's since been determined, so whatever that mosaic meant it must not have meant that. So let's just help people understand the truth and scratch that right out but that's a sermon for another day. And you can see as I said she's with some saints so you can see the halos in the picture, how many halos are in the picture kids? Three. You might think it's three but it's actually four. There are three circular halos and one square halo.

[Laughter]

Thank you yes that is a rectangle. It's square like the royal square, it's like it's squared it's a squared halo meaning that it has right angles in it. You should take geometry. Is a ninety nine in geometry right now. So a square halo was used in sacred art to indicate people who were living saints, the other Saints had died and gone on and made it to heaven and that you know or whatever the version of that that they used to determine a saint in those days was and so they had circular halos. But Theodora was just a living saint, she was on her way. And so her halo, you know a circle is a perfect shape with no angularity no bends no points, right? It's eternal, it's perfect, whereas when it's squared, kind of pointy, it's not quite so soft and hasn't quite been brought to its finished form and so a square halo is for somebody who's a work in progress. So you know what I can ask you do now, right? Some of you've already done it. I'm going to ask you to make your halo and I'm going to ask you to square your halo, to make it into a square or rectangle, whatever you like. And as you do that I want to be one of the other texts from the Lectionary for All Saints Day, can I do that while you square your halo? This is from the Book of Revelation, that in fact it's not only the last book of the Bible but it's the second to last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 21 1-6. This is John's vision of the end of all things, it's the apocalypse, the revealing of the end. And here's what he says at the end:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: ‘See? The home of God is among mortals he will dwell with them they will be his peoples and God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. Mourning and crying in pain will be no more for the first things have passed away.’ And the one who was seated on the throne said: ‘See? I am making all things new.’ Also

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he said: 'Write this for these words are trustworthy and true.' And he said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega. The A and the Z. The beginning and the end to the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.'"

I love this passage from Revelation. It's one of my favorite places in the whole Bible to turn because what do we think of when we think of the Apocalypse, the Book of Revelation? We think of this dramatic, confusing, violent end of the world. Fire and brimstone and all that kind of stuff. But here's the end of the story, the end of the end of the story you have God wiping away every tear. And not a God who comes and burns the earth down but a God who recreates the heavens and the earth, who gives us a new holy city a new world, where everybody is God's person and every people group is God's people. That's the picture of the end that John gives us and we twisted into this this bizarre a violent dramatic thing. It's dramatic alright? And weeks like this it sure seems bizarre. But one thing it's not is violence. And did you notice how close some of those words were to the words from the prophet Isaiah that I read at the beginning of my sermon today? So you have this ancient prophetic writing from Isaiah, thousands of years old, you have this to us also ancient but not as ancient vision from John of things that are in the future? Who knows how many years or centuries or millennia in the future. Sometimes the cry of the Church is an "OK now would be great, come Lord Jesus." But this future vision, which fulfills the ancient image is what we stand in the middle of. We find ourselves in this tension place between the vision that Isaiah even had, long before the time of Jesus. And the vision that John had of what happens when Jesus returns and makes all things new and all things right and good. And in the middle we have a post resurrection but still not completed existence.

You've heard me use the nerdy theological phrasing of already/not yet, you've heard that if you've been around Artisan for long it's one of my things that I come back to. That moment of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus has already happened. The conquest of Satan, sin and death has happened and yet it has not come to its fullest fruition and to its completion in the whole world. And we are left in that in-between space, which how many people like to be in an in-between space? How many people would say "I just love it when things are not finished yet"? When the beauty that's promised to us is not really here yet for us to experience, when the peace that's promised to us is not mine to see or experience yet, and we just love being in that in-between space. We don't. We hate it. It gives us weeks like the week we had this week. Where we are just beside ourselves and confused and bewildered at how the world could be the way it is. And returning to those scriptures from our past and from our future can be one part of experiencing some healing in the midst of a week like this. But the other thing that we have to remember is that some other people exist in that in between space between Isaiah and Isaiah's vision and John and John's vision is not just Jesus there— we are all there too. And we're there experiencing the pain of it but we are also there because we are supposed to be

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part of making that future thing a reality, of pulling that future a little bit closer to the present. That's part of our job as people of Christian faith, as people who place our hope and trust in the risen Christ and the redemption that's been promised to us. We must be part of making that reality come to be reality sooner rather than later.

And so take a look at your squared up Halo maybe like mine it's kind of bent and looking weird. It's far from perfect but it's there. And I want you to take it with you this week, it's silly I know it's silly but I want to take it with you put it on your bathroom mirror, your bedside or next to the coffee maker. So you'll see it when you're on your hour of greatest need.

[Laughter]

And I want you to remember that even though you're Halo isn't perfectly circular, that someday it will be. And that even though the world is not completely redeemed and repaired, someday it will be. And in that in-between time and the in-between space you just gotta put your halo on and get to work.

Let's pray. God on a week like this when the stories from the news have broken our spirits, we are grateful for words of comfort from Scripture even though it is hard to accept them and believe them. May they be true for us and we get glimmers of peace and hope and joy and justice. And then Lord help us not just to sit complacently with that but to take up our cross and follow you. The suffering servant who is our savior. Help us to turn our suffering into service help us to see the suffering around us and to treat it with service and love. In this way following the example of your Son Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with you in the Holy Spirit one God now and forever. Amen.

I invite you to come. As we sing our last couple of songs and experience the brokenness of Christ. This is what we do every week when we hear the word proclaimed. Come and receive the grace and mercy on offer in this sacramental form on the table of the Lord. It's an open table at Artisan meaning you don't have to be a member here to partake, you simply have to be seeking to follow into this beauty and truth in the way of Jesus. And so if you come up through these two middle aisles and come to the table take a piece of bread to put in one of the cups. You can take it right there at the table and then return to your seat from the outer aisles. Take the bread and remember Christ's body, which is broken for you. Dip it in the wine or the juice and remember his blood, which is shed for the forgiveness of sins and may it be food for your hungry weary souls and an act of unity with each other and Christians around the world, throughout time and may it be truly the real presence of The Body and Blood of the Savior Jesus. Our table is open. Come if you will.

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[end of sermon]

[Male voice] For more information visit us at ArtisanChurch.com