

Meditation: **Gathered at the Table** - Ephesians 1:11-19

Today is the Feast of All Saints Sunday. Saint's day began centuries ago as a way to mark the anniversaries of the deaths of church martyrs – recognizing their deaths as their birthdays into the church triumphant. By the middle of the first millennium, there were so many martyrs that a specific day was named to honor all the saints, remembered and forgotten, known and unknown. In our Reformed tradition, we recognize God's presence with all people, ordinary and saintlike, as all are equally embraced through God's love. So we reflect on the lives of those who came before us that we may be inspired to continue our journey of faith in ordinary and saintlike ways.

Let us pray:

Prayer

Guide us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, that in your light we may see light, in your truth find freedom, and in your will discover your peace which sustains us and keeps us from losing heart. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the year 1847, the United States was comprised of only 29 states. In that year, the U.S. post office issued its first stamps, featuring George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. In the same year, these United States were engaged in the Mexican-American War. Also, Brigham Young led 148 Mormon Pioneers to what is now Salt Lake City. A rising congressman from Illinois named Abraham Lincoln was introduced to the world. All in 1847. In the same year, 175 years ago, a successful businessman named Jesse Ketchum donated a plot of land here in Buffalo and gave \$5000 (equivalent to \$175k today) to build a church – And such were the early beginnings which led to Westminster Presbyterian Church, Buffalo.

Jesse Ketchum¹, founder of this church, spent much of his childhood working a farm from sunrise to sunset. And he longed to go to school but was not permitted for he had to earn income for the family. Later in life his leather tannery business, along with much hard work, led to his wealth. Jesse did much more than donate this land, and help to build this church; once he made his fortune, he decided that as opposed to building his wealth he was more interested in giving his wealth away for the good of the community. He offered financial assistance to families affected by the cholera epidemic, and later to families of men enlisted to the Civil War. He gave to schools, built schools here in the city, would visit schools teaching children to be thrifty while abstaining from alcohol and tobacco. Each year, he visited every classroom in every school to deliver books to every student and teacher. He was so beloved within the schools that when he died, the Buffalo schools closed the day of his funeral as a way to honor him. His funeral held here in this sanctuary, where his vision of a church had become a reality and where the funerals of so very many saints have followed. We have inherited Jesse's legacy, along with the legacy of the nameless thousands of saints who carried our faith as members of this congregation. Surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, this faith along with the ministries of this church are now ours to carry. While standing upon their shoulders, we are also supported by those who have passed before us – their baptisms now complete as we continue to live into our baptism.

Through the waters of baptism and through the gift of the Spirit we have received a great inheritance. During the first century, writing to a newly formed church in Ephesus the apostle Paul's words speak to us today as we are reminded of where

¹ Jesse Ketchum information was gathered from the following site: <https://buffalostreets.com/2015/05/21/ketchum/>.

our inheritance began. Our lectionary epistle reading opens, “In Christ, we have also obtained an inheritance...” This inheritance is immeasurable, yet uncomplicated. Our inheritance is lavish yet practical. Seemingly beyond our reach, while actually within our hands. And as with any received inheritance, as recipients we have a choice to make: Do we keep this inheritance for ourselves, or do we share this inheritance with others?

Through Christ we have inherited the gifts of grace and love and, to be clear, these gifts are not meant to be simply passed on to others. First this grace and love must be embraced and realized, and beyond an intellectual understanding. An understanding of both mind and heart, both knowing and embracing an unconditional love with the assurance that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. All the while God’s grace continues to chase after us. An inherited love and grace. When one embraces, one is then fully equipped to share.

An inheritance, passed through the generations of saints who journeyed before us. From that early church in Ephesus to the early beginnings which led to Westminster; love and grace passed through the continued ministries of Westminster’s saints since those early days. An inheritance now woven within our DNA, created to embrace and share the gifts of grace and love. And we are committing to share together through *Building a Bigger Table*.

Thank you to those who have already submitted your pledge cards for 2023, and to those who are ready to make your pledge today. As you come forward for Communion, you can place your pledge card in a basket held by a member of our Generosity Committee. Regardless of whether you already submitted your pledge, are doing so today, or in the future, or intentionally choosing not to pledge, we are

community gathered at the table receiving the sacrament, connecting our *Building a Bigger Table* with the table of Christ where we continue receiving this love and grace. Equipped to follow in the footsteps of the saints who have come before us.

I share with you, Westminster, the words of Saint Paul to the Ephesian church, which in scripture has become a letter to all churches. He writes, “I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation., ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which God has called you, what are the riches of God’s glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of God’s power for us who believe...”

Amen.