



Worship Series: Thanksgiving—A Christian Way of Life

“Embracing Our Inheritance”

3 November 2013—All Saints Day

FUMC, Arlington, Texas 76011

11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, 12 so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; 14 this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.

17 I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18 so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. 20 God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all (Eph. 1:11-23).

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“This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption” (Ephesians 1:14).
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The church has two chief understandings about what a saint is. Routinely when the church celebrates All Saints Day, we remember departed believers who handed to us the faith experience in Jesus Christ. This notion of saints suggests that these departed persons “now rest from their labors” (Rev. 14:13). These saints have, as Paul writes of himself, “fought the good fight” (2 Timothy 4:7).

In addition the term “saint” can be any person, living or dead, who belongs to the Body of Christ. As such they were and are preeminent stewards of God’s gifts and graces with which God endowed believers. A saint is, biblically speaking, not merely a person placed in stained glass windows upon death, but rather are believers who roll up their sleeves here and now. They work for justice and equity today. When the church observes All Saints Day, it remembers those who have passed from the human scene. Yet as we remember these persons formerly among us, they inspire us as God’s



saints even today.

The epistle lesson today addresses the concept of the inheritance or legacy that believers have received from God. Many scholars detect in the first chapter of Ephesians a collage of early Christian hymns and creeds. The logic is thick and in some ways nearly impenetrable. In fact most modern translations divide verses 3-14, which is one sentence in Greek, into various sentences to increase understanding.

Regarding stewardship we focus on the notion of inheritance found in verses 11, 14, and 18. The inheritance is primarily for saints to “live for the praise of his glory.” We saints, or believers, receive this divine inheritance “with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.”

In the briefest possible way, the inheritance is a summing up of all of God’s benefits to believers. To be precise “in Christ we have also obtained an inheritance so that we . . . might live for the praise of his glory.” The inheritance sets our hope on Christ and hearing gospel truth about salvation. These divine benefits mark the saints with the seal of the Holy Spirit. What does it mean to “live for the praise of his glory” (verses 6, 12, 14)? Perhaps it means that stewards live lives that please God. Thus stewards express both gratitude and praise. Nothing pleases God like people living in faith.

The word the church employs for stewardship derives from the Greek word that in English we render as “economy.” Stewardship basically means “to manage a household.” Sadly, when many hear the word stewardship, the only household that comes to mind is the household of money. Yet everything Christians manage is a household. For example, we are Christian stewards over our power, devotion, spiritual life, listening, prayer, worship, support of others, benevolence, and many, many other households. Without a doubt whatever we manage or control is a stewardship “household.” Clearly our households include money, but stewardship is also a richer concept than merely money.



In modern parlance we usually think of an inheritance as consisting of land, stocks and bonds, or financial assets. In the first century people doubtlessly conceived of inheritance in a comparable manner. Still the author of Ephesians writes about believers' divine inheritance that can never be taken away. People can lose almost anything that they enjoy as a benefit—health, wealth, prestige, and the like. Yet no one can remove our inheritance of salvation from God in Christ. Genuine stewards practice managing the household of faith and salvation that God gives us as an inheritance. The inheritance God gives stewards is a great divine trust that God expects us to value.

Bruce Modahl writes a lovely childhood memory for All Saints Day:
In the early evenings of my childhood, the mothers in the neighborhood stuck their heads out the back screen doors and called to their children. "Bruce, come home for supper," my mother sang. "Coming," I chanted back.

"Roberta, Alan, Dale, Steve, Terry, time for supper," the other mothers sang in turn. We broke off our play and headed for the family dinner table.

Standing at the Lord's Table on All Saints Sunday, I call to supper all of those who have gone before us. "Coming," they reply.

And we join our voices with theirs and here, in this Lord's supper, the distance between heaven and earth thins out, the great divide grows porous, the Jordan River narrows, and we sit down to supper together (Bruce Modahl, *Christian Century*, 27 Oct 1999, p. 1025).

O blessed communion, fellowship divine
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine.
Yet, all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluia. Alleluia.