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Nov

Witnesses

Always Give Thanks

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

First, we are chosen, then we are tested. Now, we witness.

REFERENCES

Joshua 3:7-17

Psalm 107:1-7, 33-37

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

Matthew 23:1-12

COLORS

White

Planning Worship

Focus text: 1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

First, we are chosen, then we are tested. Now, we witness. Witness has a long history in the context of worship, but Paul isn't really talking about speaking in worship when he writes to the Thessalonians. No, Paul is talking about a more holistic witness—the witness of our words and our life to the work of God among us. So, as you prepare for All Saints Day, consider the many different expressions that witness can take. What is the legacy of past saints that your church still witnesses in your midst? What does the witness of your church sound, smell, and taste like in your community? What stories shaped your witness in the past and today? What witness do you want to shape your future?

Additionally, what does your congregation need to witness today? Where are people hurting and struggling in your community? Where are your neighbors struggling to survive, much less thrive? Where are the hidden places that your church needs to turn its attention to, the places where good news seems so far away? Paul's witness to the Thessalonians allows us to exercise both parts of witness—noticing and proclaiming, paying attention and sharing the story.

So, as you remember the saints today, let their witness guide your community to pay attention and pray for the people who need the gospel right now. Let your prayer of confession or intercession point your congregation to those places in your community and around the world where the vulnerable suffer and where injustice still reigns. *And* let the witnesses of the saints—the stories of the saints who have gone on and those present today—guide how the church responds to the needs in your community. Perhaps you invite a youth to tell a story about a grandparent, an aunt, an uncle, or another congregant who taught them something about God. Maybe have older adults and the children's ministry work together to create a piece of art depicting how they notice God at work, and then include it on the altar. Or you might leaf through old bulletins and do a medley of hymns that have shaped the heart song and identity of your congregation. However, you choose to celebrate All Saints Day, in the midst of the grief and loss that this day brings, build in moments for gentle thanksgiving and joyful witness. This is a day of remembering that we are all part of the cloud of witnesses, bound together through Christ across all times and places because God's word and grace are at work in us.

Dr. Lisa Hancock, Director of Worship Arts Ministries, served as an organist and music minister in United Methodist congregations in the legacy Northwest Texas and North Texas Annual Conferences. After receiving her Master of Sacred Music and Master of Theological Studies from Perkins School of Theology, she earned her PhD in Religious Studies from Southern Methodist University, where she researched and wrote on the doctrine of Christ, disability, and atonement. Lisa is also the co-lead of the Growing in Grace: Accessible Worship for All God's Children initiative.

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