

Man and dust have a special relationship. Dust is man's beginning and it is his end. Adam was formed from dust. And each time we gather to bury a loved one, we see the truth which God proclaimed to Adam because of his sin, "Dust you are and to dust you shall return." Yes in the end, each of us must dwell in the dust. It can be said that man's life is a journey from dust to dust.

Today we are celebrating All Saints day. It is a day to take time to thank God for those people that have gone before us in the faith and now dwell in the dust. But today the question could be asked, why focus on those that are dwelling in the dust? Sure, they are people which we loved, but we as Lutherans know that the saints are not to be worshipped. So, why do we have a day set apart to remember them?

Well, the short answer is this; we pause today to thank God for them. We thank him for the roles they played in our lives. We thank God for the way in which he used them to directly or indirectly pass the faith on to those of gathered here today. And finally, we also ponder them in order that we might imitate those who fought the good fight of faith and now rest from their labors. But should we really try to imitate them? After all they were sinners just like us. We surely don't need any help when it comes to sinning. But those that went before us were much more than sinners. They were also saints just like us, made holy by our God. Those that have gone before serve as the assurance of God's faithfulness to all generations. They serve to remind us that those that who stand on the solid rock of God surely are made to be saints by him through his manifold grace.

Yes, their story is our story. Because of their sin, all those that have gone before us were people headed straight for the dust. Yes, they, like us, could fight against their trip to the dust with all their might. They could fight it with our good works. They could fight it with all their piety. They could fight it with all their time and effort. But if they were the ones fighting their descent into the dust, it was useless. As our text pictures it, without God they, like us, would be like a pregnant woman who brings forth nothing after many long hours of labor. All the work, all the pain, and nothing to show for it but sin.

But the saints that have gone before us teach us more than the futility of our own actions to save us. Indeed, they knew that it was not their works that would save them from

the dust. But even more they knew that the Rock on which they stood could assure them that their journey would not truly end in the dust. On All Saints' Day, we don't stop to celebrate and honor the saints for works they somehow worked on their own, but rather we celebrate the works that God worked in them. We celebrate the faith he worked in them in baptism and sustained through word and supper. We celebrate their reliance on God and the fruit that bore in their life. The saints that have went before us assure us by their lives that the statement of Isaiah is true, "Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock." Yes, their god and our God is the rock of ages. Their God is our God. The God that we believe in today is the same God those that rest out in our cemetery also believed in. And that is our connection with them.

We do well also to remember that the faith of the saints before us bore much fruit. The faith in the hearts found its action in their lives. In the past, this church has had women who spent countless hours quilting. It has had many people that have helped to educate our children in the day school. It has had people who built the buildings in which we worship and learn stone by stone. But the message today is not that if we want to follow in their footsteps we must pull back out the sewing machines, open the school, and start bringing limestone back up from the quarry. We strive not to imitate those that have gone before us in doing the same works that they did, but rather we imitate the way in which they trusted in the Rock. It is not that the fruits of our faith must be identical to theirs, but our faith itself must be identical. After all, there is one Lord one Faith and One baptism for them and for us.

To follow in their footsteps simply means that we stand on the rock. It simply means that we trust in the Lord. As we do that, the works will simply flow out of us. No doubt, some of the works we do will look different than those that have gone before us. But that is fine. God have given each one of us talents to let our faith shine through and placed us in a particular time to act. As Jesus taught the true work of God is to believe in the one he sent, Jesus himself. The rest will simply follow.

Finally, today we must recognize the last thing that our text teaches. All of us that stand on the Rock have one last thing in common. As we often say in the liturgy those who believe and are baptized shall be saved. Our life's journey does not end in the dust. All of

those that trust in the Rock have this promise from him. Those that dwell in the dust will be raised by the Rock. God himself assures us today again in our text that those who trust in Him will not dwell in the dust forever. As Isaiah prophesied, when God returns, he will say, “Awake and Sing ye that dwell in the dust.” And when he does, we will rise and sing. Those that have gone before us will come out of their graves. And we will join them. Then we will say surely this is our God we rested upon him and he has saved us. We will stand with Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Jacob, Mary, and all of those saints that now rest in our cemetery and rejoice that God has made us one through his sacrifice on the cross and his triumph on Easter morning. We have great reason to celebrate that we are connected with all who believe in Jesus throughout the world and with all who have gone before us in the faith as well.

Today we step again to the communion rail to receive Christ’s body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. I don’t know if you have ever thought about it, but as far as I know there has never been a church that has a communion rail which forms a complete circle. All churches have either a semi-circle rail or a place to gather on one side of the altar. The reason for that is not simply for the sake of ease. Communion rails are designed this way to remind us that the communion we have is not with only those of us gathered bodily in the church today. Rather we have communion with all the saints from around the world and also all those saints that from their labors rest. In essence we are to be reminded visually that on the other side of our altar kneel all the rest of those people that God has made holy, called to be saints. And we thank God for that communion.

Yes, Man and dust had a special relationship. Dust was man’s beginning and it was his end. Adam was formed from dust. And each time we gather to bury a loved one, we see the truth which God proclaimed to Adam because of his sin, “Dust you are and to dust you shall return.” Yes, each of us will dwell in the dust. But no longer can it be said that our life is a trip from dust to dust. For from out of the dust we will arise. When our God says, “Awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust” we know that his word will not only call for us to rise but cause us to rise as well. We will rise and sing with all the saints. We will rise and sing forever.

Amen.