

## Newsletter Reflections for November

It seems the pace of everything around us picks up this time of year. I used to blame it totally on marketing efforts of retailers since they seem to put out Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas items all just as soon as the red, white and blue of the 4<sup>th</sup> of July have cleared their shelves. I still believe the over stimulations of having all these reminders of approaching seasons thrust out at once tends to make it harder to separate and enjoy each one for the special time and event that it is. I don't really relish Halloween, and have never understood the elaborate yard decorations which have become so popular around that occasion, but there is something to be said for stopping awhile and appreciating the day which follows: All Saints' Day. There is also something else to notice about this month of November which is worthy of helping us approach that coming season the retailers are in such a hurry to get us anticipating. Besides All Saints' Day, November is the time we recognize Veteran's Day and Thanksgiving Day. Neither of these occasions call for great expenditures of money, except perhaps for Thanksgiving at the grocery store...but they are times when we could spend some fruitful time in thinking about our lives; those people in our lives past and present who have meant a great deal to us; those people and events in the life of our country which have shaped us and what is happening around us in this moment; and those many things for which we should be thankful as we come to that celebration at the end of the month. And I am not speaking of the one which the retailers are trying to promote (Black Friday/Cyber Monday, etc.). When reflecting on All Saints' Day in worship we often turn to the Letter to the Hebrews which was actually a sermon directed to a young church composed probably of Jewish Christians. They had and were probably still facing challenges to this faith which they had come to accept and might be considering leaving. Some of them may have originally been newly converted Gentiles. The many references to those "heroes" deeply embedded within Jewish traditions leads to the understanding that that tradition plays a large role in the message being given. Today, many challenge the value of tradition for our lives in the modern world. On a day like All Saints' Day, we can pause to reflect on whether or not the tradition we value is actually valuable or represents only a fear of change. Are we holding on to values which formed the tradition, or the shell formed around the values? When I think about those folks that I consider "saints" in my life, the values they taught me are timeless. Holding on to the values is not something that I consider a matter of tradition. I find it interesting that two controversial figures (for different reasons: Elizabeth Warren/Ellen DeGeneres) of our times when challenged about something they said or did recently used the same reason for that action. The reason they gave was that the first song they remembered learning in Sunday School was: **Jesus loves the little children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.** To them that meant that love for others triumphed over other differences. Embracing that understanding of our fellow human beings can lead to changing the world—but what if it requires abandoning tradition to do so? Next on the calendar comes

November 11<sup>th</sup>, Veterans Day; a day established to recognize and honor those who have served in our country's armed forces. Within my lifespan the nature of that service has changed from a uniformed service required by a draft drawn from the entire "male" population to one formed by volunteers; to one engaged in wars with defined endings to armed conflicts which never end. While this day should continue to be one where those who risk so much are recognized and thanked, perhaps we should also consider why when the burden shifted, the duration and nature of warfare also shifted. Perhaps we should also consider if it is because of those facts that our "veterans" receive so little recognition on other days? There are lots of things to reflect on as we honor those who have served and those who are continuing to serve in these troubled times. Although not on most calendars, on my church calendar, the last Sunday in November marks the last day of the church year and is known as Christ the King Sunday. It is the Sunday we celebrate the sovereignty of Christ as we begin to prepare to celebrate his Advent into the world as the baby Jesus in December. Although this is not always the case, this year we celebrate Christ's kingship the Sunday before our nationally recognized day of Thanksgiving on November 28<sup>th</sup>. This was originally set aside to be a day of prayer and giving thanks for the blessings of the year. For many, it is still a time of family's gathering around food and fellowship, but often the focus is more about football and anticipated shopping sprees for the Black Friday sales which seem now to start before the Thanksgiving meal is even over. It seems we have enthusiastically bought into the retailers plan. Yet I would suggest that November offers us a much more beneficial way to enter the month of December...if we spend some time pausing at each of these occasions to reflect on the saints who have been in our lives, the veterans we have known and the Lord who has called us, then our Thanksgiving Day will be a time to give heartfelt and joyous thanks and experience the peace which only is found with understanding how blessed we are.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby

Included in this Newsletter for November you will find a suggestion for an Advent Calendar which I found appealing. Instead of opening the days and revealing a treat for children in a home, this calendar offers the suggestion of gathering an item to contribute to a food basket day by day as we draw nearer to the birth of the Christ child. If anyone is interested in participating, I will be placing a basket in the Narthex on Sunday, December 1. Items can be placed there for each day or randomly as you would like. The items collected will be taken to CAM at the end of the month.