

October 20, 2020

Dear Church,

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.”
Hebrews 12:1

Autumn is one of my favorite things. I love seeing the leaves change, getting out my cozy socks and sweaters and having a good excuse to have a near constant cup of tea or hot chocolate in my hands. This season is a reminder for me of the impermanence of things; that life runs in ongoing cycles of dormancy and renewal, or one might even say death and resurrection. I like that the slow turn of nature toward a season of latent winter reminds me too that it is okay to rest, and in fact rest will be necessary if new growth is ever to arrive.

I also appreciate autumn because two of my favorite church holidays fall in this season - on consecutive days, no less! Growing up in a conservative Lutheran church, Reformation day was always a production. It was red banners and brass choirs and a celebration of heritage - pretty exciting for a kid. All Saints did not become all that important until I came back to the church in my early 20s. The church I attended in Denver had the most lovely observance. We were encouraged to bring pictures or mementos of our deceased loved ones and to place them on a special altar that ran the length of the sanctuary wall. We remembered them, read aloud their names, and invited them to guide us and to worship with us. It was such a meaningful way of channeling grief and celebrating the lives of our dearly departed, as well as remembering the “great cloud of witnesses” that Paul writes of in his letter to the Hebrews.

To be church is to step into that cloud of witnesses, really; to be connected to the faithful who came before you and those who will come after. I am comforted in these times of pandemic, protest, and politics that the church has been through all of this before, and much more, and has survived, has remained faithful and steadfast. I think this is due to two things: 1) we know what the church really is - not a building, not one set of traditions, but a people who come together to attempt to follow Jesus and 2) we have a remarkable ability to adapt - to be reformed. Circumstances have often demanded that the church reinvent itself, and we have, time and again, and often find that we are the better for it. We have proven that we have sticking power.

So have no fear my friends, even in these strange times that we are living through. We will continue to be a reforming church, as we always have been.

Peace be with you,

Pastor Emily