

For the Journey

Oct. 29, 26

Rev. Dave Crawford



As Christians within the United Church of Canada our roots are twofold. As part of the universal (or catholic) church were grounded in the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, events which occurred some two thousand years ago in what the Roman Empire initially called Judaea (previously known by the Hebrew term Judah). Yet our rebirth, of sorts, took place within the context of the Reformation, one of the most consequential grass-roots movements in European history, shaping culture, politics, art, education, and even wars across the European continent for the past 500+ years, ever since Martin Luther nailed his list of 95 grievances or theses to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, on October 31st, 1517. Although others before Luther had dared to criticize what were considered to be deviations from orthodox church teachings and practices, Luther and his 95 Theses represented the first salvo launched openly, decisively, against the church.

That twofold identity possessed by all Protestants, including the original three that amalgamated in 1925 to form the UCC, the Methodists, the

Presbyterians, and the Congregationalists, presents worship leaders with a liturgical conundrum every year at the end of October and the Beginning of November. Are we to celebrate Reformation Sunday (observed by thousands of congregations on Oct. 31st), or are we to celebrate All Saints' Day (observed by tens of thousands of congregations on November 1st)? Reformation Sunday goes back only 509 years, while All Saints Day goes all the way back to the 9th century. At CUC we celebrated Reformation Sunday last year on Sunday, Oct. 26th, and All Saints Day Nov. 2nd. Given that the coming Sunday is Nov. 1st, we're focusing on All Saints.

There's a significant difference, however, in how Protestants and Roman Catholics observe All Saints and it has to do with divergent traditions. For our Roman Catholic friends All Saints Day and All Souls Day (Nov. 2nd) are intimately connected. While All Saints commemorates those already with God in heaven, All Souls is dedicated to praying for the deceased. Why? Put simply and perhaps crudely, Catholics maintain a belief in the existence of purgatory, therefore prayers for the souls of those relegated to that in-between spiritual existence are an integral part of the faith. They pray for the dead. Protestants don't believe in purgatory's existence and we don't pray for the dead, ever, primarily because we don't believe the dead are in need of prayer. Rather we trust and believe they've already been taken up into the fullness of God's presence through God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Now while all of that may or may not be of interest, what I hope is of interest is what we'll be doing at church Sunday morning at 10 a.m. We will take time for remembering loved ones no longer with us but whom, we trust, are with God. We will light candles and share special words, we will sing faith-filled hymns and offer prayers of gratitude and praise, not only for the lives of the dearly departed while we knew them here in this life, but also for the eternal promises of God in Christ the Lord.

All Saints Day. Hope to see you at worship.
Grace and Peace,
Rev. Dave

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,..." - Hebrews 12:1