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Hymns: 478, 11:5, 469, 468, 475.
Lessons: Deuteronomy 26:16 – 27:1, Galatians 5:19-26, Matthew 7:15-29.
Text: Ephesians 1:1b.
Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

One of the trick questions I have used in Catechism Instruction with our children is "Do you know any saints?" It is a trick question because the answer is "Yes". Some people think of a saint as a holy dead person. But that is not a correct answer for "Who is a saint?"

Today let's talk about

SAINTS
1. **What makes them "saints", that is, what makes them "holy"?**
2. **Who are they?**

Paul addresses his letter *"to the saints in Ephesus"*. That is the faithful in Christ Jesus. That is the believers. In our day the word "saint" has taken on a somewhat different meaning from the one intended here. Common usage today is inclined to attach the term to people who have died – such as "my sainted grandmother", or people give the term "saint" to someone whose conduct was such as to make people think that they are much better than an ordinary person – "he's a real saint". The Roman Catholic Church teaches that some dead people have gone through a formal process and may finally be called "saints" who have a surplus of good works in God's sight, and through prayer such good works may be applied to the life of anyone. This is not the scriptural use of "saint".

Paul intends more than that. Literally the term "saints" means "holy ones". And that is precisely how Paul regards his readers. If we look ahead to the fourth verse of this letter, we hear Paul say they are people whom God chose *"before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight"*. That holiness and blamelessness, of course, can come only through the forgiveness of sins received by faith in Christ. So in this letter Paul was addressing believers, just as he used the very same word in five other letters to specific congregations or groups of believers, letters which he also addresses to "saints". We might paraphrase his words, "to the believers in Ephesus who are holy by faith in Christ Jesus." Incidentally, in the three other letters he addressed to congregations or groups of Christians in geographic areas, Paul uses the word "church". And the word "church" is used as a synonym for "saints". His other letters are addressed to specific individuals: Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

Because a few manuscripts of the many hundreds that have been found do not contain the words "in Ephesus", some people question whether this letter was intended for the congregation in Ephesus. But the content of the letter is not affected by its destination, the people to whom it was originally written. It remains God's inerrant, inspired message for all time and would remain so even if it were a general letter intended for a number of congregations. It should be noted however that the majority of manuscript evidence going back to the earliest times and drawn from all areas in which Christians copied this letter favors inclusion of the words "in Ephesus".

St. Paul – there, I used the word "saint"! We call Paul, formerly known as Saul of Tarsus, as we talked about last week, a saint because he believed that Jesus saved him from his sins.

He addressed this letter to "saints". When that Greek word is used as a noun it means "saints", "holy ones", and the NIV often translates it "God's People" or even "God's Holy People". That is an excellent translation.

But when the same word is used as an adjective, it most forcefully is used in the Scriptures talking about the third person of the Triune God: the Holy Ghost, The Holy Spirit. The same word is used in that way as an adjective!

How remarkable that God's people, believers, should be identified with the same description as the third person of the all-holy God! That tells us a great deal about how God regards believers!

But what makes one a Christian? What makes one a child of God? What makes someone one of Christ's saints? It is faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Saints believe, as scripture teaches, that God starts with a sinner – and who of us is not a sinner? Not one. St. Paul quotes two psalms when he writes in Romans 3:10-12: *"As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.""*

A saint acknowledges that he or she is first of all a sinner. But by the grace of God sinners have been made saints.

We are all sinners who have broken God's law and deserve eternal damnation. But God's word plainly teaches in Ephesians 2:8-9**: "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.*"** We are saved eternally from damnation because Jesus Christ died on the cross for all our sins after he lived a perfect, sinless life, the life we could never live. It is God's grace, that is, his undeserved goodness and mercy which saves us from our sins. When we believe in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior from sin, we have freedom from the guilt and the power of sin, membership in His family, and are able, by God's grace, to seek *"to live a life worthy of the calling you have received."* Ephesians 4:1.

We have partnership in building up His Kingdom of Grace, and eternal life in heaven. We are part of God's family.

Can we "see" saints? Not really. We cannot see faith, which is what makes one a saint. But we accept people by their confession. We see fruits of faith, the things mentioned in our Epistle lesson, as fruits in the lives of believers.

There are 7 references to "saints" in the letter to Ephesians. After the use of the word in our sermon text, we find Paul commending these Christians, these saints for their faith and for their love for all believers: *"For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints."* Ephesians 1:15.

This book prays for enlightenment for the saints: *"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints."* Ephesians 1:18.

You recently read a sermon pointing out that believers are a community. That text, for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, July 4, 2010, included these words from Ephesians 2:19-22: *"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."*

Paul humbly admits that he doesn't deserve the grace of God when the word, here translated "God's People" is used in Ephesians 3:8: *"Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."*

He speaks again of the unity that all believers share in when he prays that the Ephesian Christians *"may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."* Ephesians 3:18.

Paul writes about the goal of God's giving servants and leaders to the church in this way: *"It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up".* Ephesians 4:11-12.

This letter points out the kinds of things – all sins, trespasses, and offenses – that are "improper" for saints, including these things: *"But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people."* Ephesians 5:3.

Saints have been made holy by the blood of Christ. When he writes to the Corinthian Christians, he asks: *"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."* 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Paul, in speaking of marriage and comparing it to Christ's love for the church, for his saints, speaks of Christ's work as loving the church and giving himself up for her. In giving up his life on the cross, Christ made saints holy. We read that *"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."* Ephesians 5:25-27.

Near the end of the letter, Paul encourages Christians to pray for one another in *"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."* Ephesians 6:18

All believers everywhere are called the Holy Christian Church and the communion of saints because by faith in Jesus their sins are all washed away.

So do you know any saints? I hope that you can look in the mirror every morning and admit that you are a sinner AND a saint. You can be a saint only by faith in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ you are washed clean of all your sins, and you confess that daily. You turn daily to Jesus Christ in that faith and look to him for guidance.

As we sing our final hymn today, let's be reminded that the "holy ones" about whom we sing are "saints", believers! "All saints triumphant, raise the song, Alleluia! Alleluia!" Amen.