

Hebrews refers to. Read that verse of Scripture again in Hebrews 12:1. Who's in that great cloud of witnesses? Is it angels? The disciples? Famous people? Yes! I fully believe that what is referred to here includes all those faithful and faith-filled followers of Jesus who have died and gone on to be with Him. I believe it includes angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. I believe it includes the people in our lives today, people who are alive and well! Those who have shared Christ's love with us in meaningful, helpful, big, and small ways. Honestly, YOU are part of that great cloud of witnesses, too! It is all the "saints" that we talked about yesterday. As we gather for worship week in and week out, as we encourage those around us, as we pray, as we walk together in good times and in bad, we are that cloud of witnesses, letting Jesus and His love show and flow through us. What a privilege to be part of that "cheering section"! Take action and be the encourager and sharer of your faith that you're privileged to be.

Saturday – Worship

Tomorrow we'll gather together again in a time of worship as God's Church, the communion of saints. Thinking ahead to tomorrow, check out the picture of worship we receive in Revelation 7:10-12, noting the "Amen!" at both ends of the seven-fold blessing offered to our eternal God. Notice the posture of those who worship. Have you ever prostrated yourself in worship? What does that mean? It literally means to lie face-down in honor, humility, and worship. What does this imply about the worth of God and the Lamb? Compare this worship scene to the one in Revelation 5:11-14. What's the same? What's different? Talk about the sense you get in looking at these two heavenly worship scenes. This is one of many heavenly images we get of what life will be like in eternity in heaven with the Lord. What does it do to your heart? What encouragement can you find as you follow Jesus as we're still here on earth? What a blessing we have to be able to celebrate the life we have in Jesus – in a formal, corporate worship setting, in a more private, intimate setting of worship that you are in right now with this devotion, or simply walking down the hallway at work or school or a grocery store, knowing that all of life is an opportunity to worship the Giver of life! And as we worship, what joy to know that we are not alone – not now, not ever – because we have that great cloud of witnesses that is ever around us. Sing your favorite worship song or Matthew Bridges' hymn: "Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne; Hark! How the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own. Awake, my soul and sing..." Or you can enjoy this powerful hymn with some beautiful scenes of nature at this link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuMlh_ept-Js

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What Now?

1. Consider working on memorizing (or re-memorizing) Luther's explanation to the 3rd Article of the Apostles' Creed, listening for all the amazing things that are conveyed with regard to all that our Lord does through His Church and the gifts we are given as His saints: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true."
2. If you would like a *Luther's Small Catechism*, they are available on a table in the atrium. You do not need to but if you would like to contribute to the cost of the catechisms, you can leave a donation in the box on the table in the atrium or drop off your gift in the church office.

If you would like to receive daily *Bring It Home* devotions by email, please contact the church office: churchoffice@immanuelloveland.org

Monday — I Believe in the Holy Christian Church

Two key pieces of who we are as people of God are expressed clearly in the 3rd Article (or 3rd part) of the Apostles' Creed – "I believe in... the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints..." What does it mean when we profess that we believe in such things? Is it belief in a building or an institution with a bunch of rules? Is it belief in a bunch of dead people who lived good lives? Nope, nope, and nope again. In many ways, this is making a statement regarding a belief in who God has made US and how He has chosen to use us in the carrying out of His mission on earth. Through this week, we're going to explore various facets of those realities and the blessing the Church is as well as the joy of being part of the communion of saints. For the first two days of this week, I'm going to invite you to read and reflect on two of the Scripture readings we focused on this past Sunday and give you the opportunity to read them, reflect on them, and open your heart to see what God has to say to you through these very powerful Scripture passages. As you read, ask yourself some of these questions: What do you hear God saying about His Church? What is God saying to you and the life you are leading right now? How does the Lord encourage you in these verses? What questions does it raise for you? Where are you challenged? What's helpful? What's comforting? What's hard? What insights stand out for you? As always I would love to hear some of those reflections and if you're open to it, please email me at gschlecht@immanuelloveland.org. With that, read and reflect on Ephesians 2:19-22.

Tuesday — I Believe in the Communion of Saints

As I mentioned yesterday, I'm going to give you time to reflect on another of the readings we focused on this past Sunday from Hebrews, some verses that speak powerfully about what we confess in the Apostles' Creed as "the communion of saints." As you read these verses about who we are, what Jesus has done and is still doing for us, and the role of all those faith-filled people of God who have already died, ask yourself some of these questions: What do you hear God saying about the communion of saints and about His Church? How are you encouraged by the promises you read that our Lord Jesus has made to you? What is He saying to you and the life you are leading right now? How are you encouraged? What questions does it raise for you? Where are you challenged? What's helpful? What's comforting? What's hard? What insights stand out for you? Once again, I would love to hear some of those reflections and if you're open to it, please email me at gschlecht@immanuelloveland.org. With that, read and reflect on Hebrews 12:1-3.

Wednesday — The Church

What exactly is "the Church"? I'm sure a couple different definitions come to mind when I ask that question. We think of a building, of a place we go to worship, of a place where ministry happens, of an institution, of a place filled with rules and where we're told what we're not supposed to do, or things like stained glass, tradition, certain smells, etc. However, when we really think about what "the Church" really is, what we hear from Jesus

Himself is pretty interesting. Read Matthew 16:13-18 and be listening for what Jesus has to say about "the Church." Well? Whose Church is it? What is its foundation? Jesus is pretty clear (although what He said has managed to be misunderstood by some, too) when He says whose Church it is. It belongs to Him – Jesus is the one who is building it and making it happen. And what is the foundation of His Church? He uses a word play here with Peter's name, which literally means "rock." But He doesn't mean that He's building His Church on Peter but rather on the confession or statement of faith that Peter made about Jesus – that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. That is the "rock" against which the gates of hell don't stand a chance! When we talk about "the Church," I encourage you to think bigger – bigger than Immanuel and our facility on 4650 Sunview Drive. Think about all who hold this profession of faith that Jesus is the promised one, the very Son of God, and that all of us who know that and believe it constitute "the Church." That is awesome! And that includes YOU! Praise God that we are blessed to be part of our Savior's Church and His working in the world.

Thursday — The Communion of Saints

When we profess that, "I believe... in the communion of saints," what are we saying? Start by reading Psalm 34 in its entirety and as you read it, pay attention to what the Psalm writer is inviting us to do. Who is being addressed? Dead people? Perfect people? Holy people? He's addressing God's people with all of their and our sin and imperfections. Did you notice what he calls us? Look again at verse 9. That's YOU!! Who exactly is a saint? Saints are not saints by virtue of a certain style of holy living, or by death, or by perfection. We become saints as Jesus is in our hearts. When we receive that blessing of faith through baptism or through the working of the Holy Spirit later in life, we are covered, forgiven, loved, and claimed by the Lord. And because of what Jesus did for us, we are made saints by God! So when we say that we believe in "the communion of saints," we're talking about believing that God is at work in the hearts and lives of people who know and believe in His Son as their Savior, that when we gather together (another way of talking about this "communion" or community and coming together), we are exactly what we profess – the saints of God: holy by the blood of Jesus, forgiven completely, loved by God, justified, sanctified, and redeemed, sent by God to be about His work and His mission of spreading the Good News of Jesus in all we are and do. We, together with all who know and believe in Jesus as Lord and Savior, living and departed, can celebrate our sainthood and give thanks and praise to God for His love and grace. Let that be your prayer today.

Friday — That Great Cloud of Witnesses

Last November when we celebrated All Saints' Sunday, I invited you, if you were able, to do a Google search on images connected to "A Great Cloud of Witnesses." I'm holding that out again for you to do today. While there are some weird pictures (you always get that with various online searches), there are some powerful images that help us to think in a variety of ways about this "great cloud of witnesses" that the writer to the