

Who is someone who has influenced you? What was special about that person?

Would you please turn to your neighbor and tell them about a person who has influenced you and what you are remembering on this day?

Thank you so much for doing that. Isn't it fun to connect up with others? Isn't it fun to hear a little bit of their story? I love to do learn.

If you are like me, it is difficult to think of only one person who has influenced me. There are so many. Yet, every-once-in-a-while, it is really important for us to pause and to remember the people we love, the people who have influenced us, the people who have passed before us from this life to life eternal.

That is why today we are celebrating All Saints Day. It is a day to remember the ordinary, faithful people, who have lived in our midst and struggled to live faithfully and they have shown us the way to live faithfully. Many of those we remember for their faithfulness, are people we remember because they did what Paul talked about in our scripture for today. He says, *I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers.*

Paul is acknowledging these followers of God at Ephesus for two things they are doing. One is because of their faith in Christ. Who are those you admire because of their faith in Christ?

I am not the only one in this room, who would point to family members that we admire and appreciate because of their faith in Christ. I think of my own father, who passed away in January of 2005 after a brief illness with cancer. He was just a hard working man who loved God and loved the church. Each week we were in worship. He was a volunteer

Sunday School Superintendent for the entire time that my two older sisters and I were in Sunday School. Most of the time that was pretty neat, because I could see my dad when he came to pick up our offering and attendance sheets. It wasn't too fun on the rare occasions that I tried to skip Sunday School. I could never get away with it.

I think of my daughter Whitney, who died a couple of years ago. We were traveling back from one of the United Methodist Camps that she had attended during of the summers she was with us. She was so excited about her faith. She was so excited about life. She was so excited about what she was learning about her.

The memory of sitting in the car, listening to the changes taking place in her life, those memories have become good, comforting memories of Whitney. They have helped me to remember her love of life, her love of our family and her love for God.

This summer I had the chance to attend worship at a church that has closed in rural North Dakota. It was a special day for me to be back. Because of the memories I had from growing up and attending that church and its vacation Bible School. While I was there I walked through the cemetery and I saw the tombstones of people who have loved me and nurtured me; my grandparents, aunts and uncles, my great-grandparents.

While I was there I discovered that my great grandparents donated the land that the church and that cemetery now sit upon. I have been touched and influenced by their love for Christ and by their generosity.

The second thing Paul is acknowledging of these followers of God at Ephesus is of how they show their love for all the saints. Who do you know who has shown love for Christ to others?

I think of my friend Jim Petrik. He was a wonderfully successful man in business. He was a loving father. He was an adoring husband to his wife. He was a person of faith and commitment.

I got to know him after he sold his second business. Because that is when he created a stir. He sold his business and he went to the pastors in the church he was attending. They were looking for a youth worker. He went and said, "I would like the job."

They looked at him and said, "Jim, you're too old." He said, "I don't think I am. Why do you think I am?"

They said, "do you play guitar or an instrument?" He said, "No, but I know how to sing and I know how to find people who can help our youth sing."

They said, "why do you want to work with youth? This is different than owning a business." He said, "I want to work with youth, because I love them and I want to get to know them so I can help them love the Lord."

He was hired.

He is among the best youth workers I have ever experienced, because he cared. He cared about us as youth. He was actually interested in what was going on in our lives. He was real. He was honest. He was genuine. He loved the Lord and he was generous in showing his love for others.

When we take time to remember people like this, like my father, my daughter, my grandfather, my friend, it reminds us of who we are. It reminds us of where we have been and those memories become a launching pad to invite us to live into the future with hope and faith.

As a church, there are remarkable people of faith who have lived among us. You know them. They have given so much to this church, because of their love for God and their love for the saints and they are a part of our past.

Their stories of faithfulness in times of illness can give us courage and strength when we face illness. Their stories of sacrifice and love to do things like help our building get built in the first place and then expanded in the second place, can give us hope now that we are looking at expanding again in the future.

It is important to remember them. Because their stories are a part of our story. And we live in the present in this congregation because of them and their faithfulness. The question is, will we through our faith in God and love for the saints around us, offer a future for those who will follow us.

My prayer is that yes, we will be inspired by them, to live for God in the present, so God can shape our future for those not yet here.

May God help us live lives of faith.

Amen