



## ZOOM OUT

November 6, 2016, The 25th Sunday after Pentecost, All Saints Observed  
Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 6:20-31

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*God of ancient truths, Your Word comes to us from voices long ago, yet Your Spirit continues to move. You create us, inspire us, and call us to faithfulness. With Your holy fire, enliven us again that we may hear Your voice in these ancient texts. Draw us in to Your love and justice, leading us to hope when the world seems bound to discourage us. Direct us, O God, in the hearing of Your Word that we may respond in faith, following the saints who've come before us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

Last month, the creator and star of the musical *Hamilton*, Lin-Manuel Miranda, hosted *Saturday Night Live*. He's a proud New Yorker and, during the opening monologue, he was overly excited to be on that stage. Offering some self-deprecating humor he introduced himself by saying, "I am fresh off a long run performing in my musical *Hamilton*. Which fortunately is one of the biggest hits ever on Broadway, so that means most of you watching at home have no idea who I am."<sup>1</sup> But I'm pretty sure he couldn't be more wrong. *Hamilton*, since it opened in the summer of 2015, has won 11 Tony Awards and the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, "consistently selling out all the seats at the Richard Rodgers Theater and currently grossing about \$2<sup>2</sup> million a week in ticket sales."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Video of the opening SNL monologue 10-8-16: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsupmN90wBk>.

<sup>2</sup> Updated since the summer NY Times article was posted. <http://www.playbill.com/production/hamilton-richard-rodgers-theatre-vault-0000014104>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/12/theater/hamilton-inc-the-path-to-a-billion-dollar-show.html>



Although I've yet to see the musical, which by the way is me making a plug for tickets, my husband and I listen to the soundtrack every week. It all started during our road trip this past summer, and we were instantly hooked. The genius behind this musical, and I think its success, is that it takes pieces of history we've learned and tells the story in such a way that it opens our eyes to things we *never* learned. Through the musical stylings of rap and hip-hop and a largely ethnic cast, we receive a dynamic story of Alexander Hamilton and his many contributions to this nation. It's a story of history, but told in such a way that history radically speaks into our present. As Lin-Manuel pointed out on *Saturday Night Live*, history has a way of repeating itself. He said, "If you get to New York, please see *Hamilton*, it's such a nice escape from all the craziness in our world right now. It's about two famous New York politicians locked in a dirty, ugly, mud-slinging political campaign."

How true it is. Wouldn't we all love to escape the madness of our politics over the last year, especially these last few weeks? As everything comes to its crescendo this Tuesday, I think we all need a pause. The intensity around this campaign has affected us all in a variety of anxious ways, and we need some perspective. This is where I think the festival of All Saints offers us a gift. This morning in worship we find ourselves celebrating another story, a story that began long before us and will continue after us. It's the story of the Church, filled with saints and sinners like you and me. It's a story defined not by political parties and candidates, but defined by the Gospel—the story of God's love and justice in Jesus Christ.

When we hear the words that Kate read to us this morning from Ephesians, we hear that we're given a gift; an *inheritance* from Christ. We've inherited the grace of God—an identity that places Christ as our ultimate ruler. In other words our salvation is dependent upon Jesus, not any political or national leader. Moreover, we have inherited God's ministry from faithful Christians long before us. As Paul gives thanks for the church in Ephesus, today we give thanks for our own saints—those who followed Christ and worked for his justice and peace in the world. So how does that inheritance change where we find ourselves today?



Allow me to use a metaphor. I love to take pictures, but while I drag out the big Canon with the huge lens for most photography, my daughter has taught me how easy it is just to use your phone. But Hannah Ruth has actually taught me something else about photography and images in our world—it's called the "pinch and zoom in." Watching her, at 6 years old, manipulate a cell phone image, a computer screen, or a tablet is fascinating. She's learned that everything can be zoomed in on with just one little pinch. She can look at a number of things more closely and examine images in detail; it's become an intuitive part of how she navigates the digital images in her world.

Because this zoom-in feature is now innate for her, I've begun wondering about the negative aspects of this learned behavior. How much of our lives right now are defined by our ability to zoom in and only focus on the stories we want to see? Moreover, how are we allowing others to zoom in and define what we see? The intensity of our current situation in this country has zoomed in on divisive speech, hateful rhetoric, and political tension. And we ourselves have zoomed in, often, on only our own perspectives and views. Combine this with the selfish focus of a lot of social media, and we find ourselves stuck zooming in on one narrative, forgetting the other narratives before us, around us, and after us. Pinching in is not just bringing an image into greater focus—instead it's losing perspective, focusing in on only our present moment, our own needs, forgetting the history before us or the needs of others around us.

And this morning – it is time that we zoomed out.

Friends, All Saints offers us as an important corrective each year. As mentioned on the back of the bulletin, this holiday was begun in the 9<sup>th</sup> century as a way to centralize various celebrations of Christian saints. On All Saints Day, we zoom out and remember the lives of those who've gone before us. We remember their faith, their courage, and how they've shared stories of God's love. We also remember their mistakes, times when they didn't act faithfully, and moments when they could have acted with greater justice. All Saints gives us a wider, zoomed-out view, keeping us from focusing only on ourselves and the present moment.



So again, how does All Saints speak to our current political and social climate?

Well, first, it reminds us that the Church has existed long before we arrived; we're not the first to navigate social upheaval. Second, it reminds us of the call of the Church, to work not for ourselves, but for God—a God whose eternal reign and power are very different from the temporal values of this world. Read again the list of blessings and woes that Jesus preached in Luke, the second passage Kate read to us. Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the grieving, and the isolated. Woe to the rich, the prosperous, and the popular. If we really want some perspective this morning, a chance to zoom out and take a wider view—Jesus' teachings will give us just that. In his sermon, "there are blessings given to those who struggle for justice in this world, and woes given to those who are self-satisfying and do not look to the well-being of others."<sup>4</sup> This, my friends, is an eternal Gospel that spoke to generations before us and speaks to us now. It will humble us if we're listening. Jesus' sermon not only causes us to zoom out from our current reality, it also challenges us as Christians to live a different reality altogether. The Gospel and our celebration of All Saints take us away from our current zoomed-in narrative towards a greater eternal story of God's kingdom.

Back to *Hamilton* for a moment. One of the characters who draws quite a laugh in the musical is King George III, the classic comedic character in musical theater. King George dresses and speaks in a way to make us smile but also in a way that makes us listen—after all, he's the one mocking this American experiment, warning the founding fathers of what they've stepped into. Every time he sings he reminds us that, quote, "oceans rise, empires fall."<sup>5</sup> He reminds us to be careful of thinking that present history is anything novel. Although crazy King George in *Hamilton* is not the voice of prophecy, he makes an important point—we're not the first ones to live this life or endure these trials; many have come and gone before

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<sup>4</sup> <http://rev-o-lution.org/2013/10/25/worship-resources-for-november-3rd-twenty-fourth-sunday-after-pentecost-all-saints-day/>.

<sup>5</sup> A refrain repeated in all three of King George's songs in the *Hamilton* soundtrack: *You'll Be Back*, *What Comes Next?*, and *I Know Him*.



us—maybe it’s time we learned from their examples; maybe it’s time we learned from their mistakes.

So this morning as we worship, sing, share in communion, and hear the names of the saints read, I invite you to allow this feast day to shift your perspective away from our present divisive politics. I’m not asking you to ignore the serious and troubling issues of our day; I’m asking you to zoom out and widen your focus. As you sit in the pews this morning, zoom out and remember those who’ve sat there in the past. When we take communion today, zoom out and remember the lives of those who shared this meal years ago. When we sing, zoom out and remember those whose voices filled this sanctuary before us. As the names of our saints are read, zoom out and remember their stories, how they revealed the Gospel to us and served in Jesus’ name. Remember them, learn from their faithfulness and their mistakes, and carry that wisdom into the present and future. Friends, allow our celebration of the saints today to give us all some perspective, wisdom, and guidance as we seek to follow the *eternal* ministry of Christ, our Savior.

*In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.*