Opening prayer:
*Dear Lord, help us to trust in your wisdom that nothing is forgotten. Give us the strength to meet the events of our lives believing that in you all will be revealed and everything made well. Help us to surrender our anxiety so that our spirits might have ease and be at peace in love. Amen.*
*(This prayer is from a book on St. Julian of Norwich who lived in the 14th century.)*

Good morning. I stand here before you in gratitude. Preparing for this sermon over the past several weeks has enabled me to reflect on the saints in my life. Through them I have been and am currently greatly blessed. This time has made me aware that the saints in my life have made me who I am.

Today, on All Saints Sunday, I would like to focus on three areas of sainthood. First, we remember all those past saints who have made a difference in our lives and in God's world. Second, we can acknowledge the special people, those still living and those who have passed on, who have made a difference in our lives. And third, today is a day we listen for the invitation to sainthood as we live our faith through our daily activities.

What is a saint, or "How do you become one of these dudes?"
I have learned that an icon is an image through which we see the face of God. A saint is also an icon through whom we see God -- in their lives we see the goodness of God, and with their lives they call us to imitate that goodness.

For hundreds of years, starting with the first martyrs of the early Church, saints were chosen by public acclaim. During the tenth century, the bishops and finally the Vatican took over authority for approving saints. Then, in 1983, Pope John Paul II made sweeping changes in the canonization procedure. Today, the process starts many years after death in order to give perspective on the candidate. The process includes extensive investigation and evaluation which can lead to beatification and, after several miracles are validated, the person may be canonized by the Pope and proclaimed a Saint. It is a lengthy process (and you have to be dead), so if you are inspired to reach that goal you should start today.

When I reflect on All Saints Sunday, it is easy for me to focus first on the saints of the early church who we honor each Sunday in our scripture readings. These amazing individuals had a great impact on the establishment of Christianity in the first centuries. Most of these early saints were martyred and died for their faith. They may have died for their faith, but they still live to strengthen our faith through their writings and through the stories of their perseverance in difficult times.
Then there are the many saints throughout the centuries who inspire and challenge us today. I read that there are over 10,000 saints identified by the Roman Catholic Church. A few of these are most familiar to us today: St. Ignatius (c. 1492) who published his book on *Spiritual Exercises* as a challenge to many, even today, to live prayerful lives; Julian of Norwich (c. 1417) who wrote of her visions in the *Revelations of Divine Grace*, and coined her famous saying, "All will be well." Then there are St. Francis (c. 1181); St. Christopher; St. Swithin (c. 862); and our patron, St. Hugh of Lincoln (c. 1135). Yes, it is true, there is a St. Swithin -- he was a bishop in early England. A priest I know used to joke about "St. Swithin's in the Swamp." I thought it was a joke until I discovered St. Swithin is the Episcopal Church in Forks, rain capital of the world, and now home to the vampires in the Twilight series of books and movies.

And what about those modern saints (with a small s) through whom we see the face of God: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, and Martin Luther King Jr. And also consider those more personal saints that brushed your life -- your parents, your grandmother or grandfather, an aunt or uncle, or that special teacher or neighbor through whom you saw the face of God.

I love the story of the little three year-old that was busy with her crayons. Her mother said, "What are you drawing?" and she replied, "A picture of God." When her mother said that no one knows what God looks like, her daughter said, "They will when I'm finished." I think the same is true of saints. You and I know what they look like, because we have been touched by them.

All Saints Day can be both an inspiring and a discomforting day. After all, if we're going to focus on holy, perfect people -- people certainly holier than ourselves -- well, then, we may end up looking pretty unsavory in comparison. Except that saints are not holy, perfect people, but people, many like you or me, who somehow have figured out how to make their lives an offering to God.

The Apostle St. Paul -- though brilliant and visionary in his understanding of God's universal grace -- was also arrogant, overly intense, and pushy in his preaching and teaching. Mahatma Gandhi -- though the contemporary architect of the non-violent resistance movement -- was also emotionally abusive and distant from his wife. Mother Teresa -- certainly a candidate for canonical sainthood within the next ten to twenty years -- was known to be self-righteous, judgmental, and hard to touch or love.

All Saints Day worship is particularly meaningful in this holy space. When the invitation is offered to you to participate in our Eucharist, the heavenly banquet, the living saints are not the only ones who gather. The resurrected saints are also participating.

When I stand by this window, I look out at our Memorial Garden. I give thanks for those dear saints that are still part of my life. When I reflect on the names of the departed on our memorial plaque, I see images of faces and can reflect on the impact they had on
my faith. When I light a candle at our Memorial prie-dieu in memory of a departed loved one, or for healing of a friend, I give thanks.

An All Saints service in a worship space that links those living with those departed saints is a wonderful way to connect the faith of the departed with those present. In one commentary, the author observed that in some churches the most active members are the ones in the cemetery! I don't think that is true in our community.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians that "In Christ we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of him..." I think he is saying we are predestined with the possibility of being a saint. We have inherited the opportunity to have others see the goodness of God through each of us.

So, how do we live a life that displays the goodness of God? It sounds easy: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." But it is far from easy when you reflect on the previous verses from today's Gospel message to love your enemies, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who abuse you. I think today's Gospel is saying: Blessed are the poor, but also blessed are the rich who share their wealth with those in need; blessed are the hungry, but also blessed are those who are full now who share from their table with those less fortunate; blessed are those who weep, but also blessed are those who laugh when you are laughing with your companions and not at them.

The Most Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori, our Presiding Bishop, said, "Each one of us has abundance -- gifts, strengths, attitudes, abilities. Those are tools for building the reign of God. The only difficulty is that we tend to see those assets as private property, rather than gifts which we steward for a purpose. Our baptismal covenant reminds us that we are engaged in ministry in every moment of our lives, if we're conscious about it. Paying the bills, voting in elections, guiding children toward maturity, relating to colleagues in the workplace, playing on a sports team, the discussions over the dinner table, and the decisions about what to eat are all part of living as friends of Jesus. Each act and decision can be a step toward that heavenly banquet. And it needs us all -- the short and tall, blonde and dark, conservative and progressive. Each one made in the image of God, each one called beloved by God, each one sharing in the heavenly banquet."

Bishop Schori was not addressing the topic of sainthood, but I think she would agree that each of those acts fulfills the definition I shared earlier that a saint is one through whom we see the goodness of God. We each have the potential. We each have the opportunity. We each have the gifts to be intentional in our daily lives to be an example of the goodness of God to another person: In our family, at the grocery store, on the golf course or even in email when you are communicating with a friend.
Let's return for a moment, and envision the blessing that others have had on our lives. We have a family "rogues gallery" on the walls of our hallway. As I look at those pictures, they are looking back at me. I see a picture of St. Nellie, my grandmother, preparing chicken and dumplings; I picture St. Maxine, my mother, who was widowed at the age of 40, raised three boys and maintained a spirit of peace even during her years crippled with severe arthritis. These two and many others have helped me become the person that I am.

Who has shown you the goodness of God?
To whom do you give thanks for their part in your faith journey?
Who has had a positive influence on making you who you are today?

In a few minutes you will have an opportunity to come forward, be blessed at the font and then light a candle in thanksgiving for one or more saints in your life. Let's take a minute now to reflect on those for whom we give thanks.

<A minute of silence>

Gracious God, we give you thanks for the many saints throughout time who have been a positive part of our faith journey and we give thanks for our continuing opportunities to touch others as an act of God's goodness. Amen.