Part of Something Greater!
Hebrews 11:32-40
November 1, 2026

What is a skeleton's favorite snack? Spare ribs! Why didn't the skeleton go to the Halloween party? He had no-**body** to go with! Why didn't the skeleton become a soldier? He didn't have the guts! Enough of that. As every**body** knows, last night was Halloween. A celebration everything evil. How gory and gross can you possibly be? Blood, gore, death, etc. It is now the 2nd largest commercial holiday in America indicating how warped and twisted we have become. It was not always so. The name comes from the church which observed Oct 31 as a hallowed, or holy eve, or evening, because it was right before All Saints Day on November 1. That is a holy day that has largely been forgotten but it is a time to remember and honor believers who have gone before us. Our forebearers in the faith. Men and women who lived faithfully for Jesus and who are now in heaven. Mothers like those in England in the 1500s who were burned to death for teaching their children the Lord's Prayer and the 10 Commandments in English.

Men like William Tyndale who believed the English should have a Bible in their own language. Because this was illegal, he had to leave England to find somewhere else to work. He fled to Germany and later to Belgium where he completed the first English New Testament from Greek in 1526, 500 years ago this year. Early copies were sent back to England and publicly burned by Roman Catholic authorities who wanted to control the narrative instead of letting the Word speak for itself. Eventually, other copies were secretly welcomed by the spiritually starving masses who had previously depended on priests to tell them what their Latin Bibles said and meant. In 1536 while translating the Old Testament, Tyndale was arrested and charged with heresy by the Catholics. He was strangled to death and **then** burned at the stake just to make sure he was dead. But his work endures to this day. One of the only three existing copies of his first English New Testaments sold at auction in 1994 for over $1.5 million dollars. The British Library that bought it called it, "the most important printed book in the English language." About 85 years after Tyndale, the King James Version was translated and 83% of it was taken word for word from his work.

If Tyndale had been able to avoid arrest for just two more years, he would have been a hero for in 1538, the king required his New Testaments to be in every church in England. John Strype who saw this firsthand wrote, "It was wonderful to see with what joy the book of God was received … all England over, among all the …. common people; and with what greediness God's word was read… Everybody that could bought the book." Oh that we would be so greedy, so eager to read God's Word today! And how indebted we are to Tyndale and many other saints who paid the ultimate price for their

faith. We remember Tyndale and others on this All Saints Day. How very sad that Satan has once again taken something very good and very holy, like Hallowed Eve the night before and turned it into something very bad and very evil. Please open your Bible today to Hebrews 11.

Those of you who are familiar with your Bibles will know Hebrews 11 is the Hall of Faith, where the author starts with Creation and walks us through the various rooms of individuals who have demonstrated great faith through various acts. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, who has a couple rooms, Joseph, Moses, and several more. And then we come to these incredible verses which describe a whole other wing in the Hall of Faith. If you are able, please stand as we read about them from Heb 11:32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. 35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. 36 Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. 37 They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— 38 the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. 39 These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. 40 God had planned something better **for us** so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

As you know, today is orange Sunday when we remember our brothers and sisters around the world who have suffered and who are suffering for their faith. Who are in prison or being tortured for Jesus. Some are being held or killed even this minute. The orange comes not from pumpkins or even from the VA Tech orange effect, but from the color of the prison garb worn by our brothers and sisters. You might remember the 21 Christians in orange jumpsuits who were led by their Muslim captors onto the Libyan beach and then brutally beheaded with machetes 11 years ago. Their crime? Believing in Jesus. They were given an opportunity to recant and deny Jesus. They did not. And that day, they joined Tyndale and all the other saints whom we honor on this All Saints Day.

I wish I could say this sort of thing was rare, but it is not. If today is an average day in Nigeria, 17 Christians will die before it is over, a little over one every hour and a half. 3,000 lives have been taken in Nigeria alone this year and hundreds of Christian churches have been burned and/or terrorized by Muslims. In just the last 10 days, 9 Christians were slaughtered during a funeral in Jordan, 40 more were beheaded with machetes in Nigeria, and 60 were massacred in Ethiopia. May God have mercy. Even so come Lord Jesus.

Praise God for the USA where we are not only guaranteed the right to worship, but the right to freely exercise or practice whatever religion we prefer without threat of government persecution. That's not to say individuals can't and don't perpetrate violence. They do and I'm thankful for our security team, but as of now, our Constitution written and ratified by our very wise and godly founding fathers protects us from governmental regulation, interference, or harm in this regard. Could that ever change? Absolutely. Which is why it is vitally important that every Christian do two things. 1. Pray for our nation and our leaders. 2. Vote. Wherever socialism and communism have been tried, Christians, Jews and others have been and are being persecuted. It goes with that territory. Pray and vote!

Reports of such persecution around the world shock us. If we've read our Bibles, they should not. What should really shock us is that we have paid little or no real price for **our** faith. Jesus promised us in John 15:18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. 20 Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. 21 They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me." Jesus said, "Expect it! Count on it! Prepare for it!" What's shocking is that **we** haven't been persecuted to any real degree here… yet. I pray we never are.

The Greek word for persecution means to pursue. And that's what the Devil has done to Jesus' followers throughout history fulfilling His words. Some 8 years after He said this, Stephen was stoned to death in Acts 7 and a little while after that in Acts 12 the Apostle James, John's fisherman brother, was the first of the 12 to be executed by having his head chopped off while in prison.

The early church was planted in a very hostile climate for Jesus' vine to grow but it thrived. Rome ruled with an iron fist that started swinging vigorously at Christians when Emperors like Nero and Diocletian came to power. Christians were doused with oil and set on fire alive to provide light for the emperor's night-time parties. As Hebrews tells us, others went about in sheep skins, in some cases turned lose in the arena to be torn apart by lions as entertainment for warped minds just like we have today. Early Christians never celebrated blood, gore, and death. It was real enough for them. Many people knew that if they converted to Christianity, the cost could be very high and yet many of them did anyway! Church Father, Tertullian, another whom we honor today said about 200AD, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

Many early believers were martyred for their faith, killed by being burned, drowned, or strangled. And Hebrews says the world was not worthy of them! Their faith put them out of this world's league. They paid the ultimate price and were commended

for their faith. By whom? By God Himself! By their Lord Jesus Christ! They got an A+++ for their work. They didn't go out trying to get killed, they were just trying to be faithful to Jesus. The word martyr today means someone killed for their faith but it's original meaning simply meant witness. Say witness. They were just being faithful witnesses for Jesus and because they were, they were slaughtered for it. Unlike Halloween skeletons, they did have the guts, the courage to stand up for Jesus as Christian soldiers! And many still do today!

I have two books, neither of which I have read completely. They're tough reads. The first one is Foxes Book of Martyrs and begins with Jesus' disciples and how each of them were killed for their faith and goes on up through the 1600s detailing deaths of hundreds of men and women killed for Jesus. Modern versions include updates through the 20th century including martyrdoms in China, India, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Africa, and the former Soviet Union. The other one is a book that was precious to our Brethren ancestors. Martyrs Mirror includes stories of over 4,000 Christians including many of our spiritual predecessors who were tortured and killed including thousands across Europe. When Nancy and I were in Grunigen, Switzerland where my 6th great Gochenour grandfather left to come here, the book on our restaurant table had drawings of people being hanged and beheaded for their faith. Most were Anabaptists like us. I wonder why he left? Not exactly bedtime reading. And some were martyred for Jesus before Jesus. Of course Daniel faced the lions' den but Jewish records tell us that Isaiah who gave us some of the clearest prophecies about Jesus is the one sawed in two by the wicked king Manessah in about 700BC. Imagine what that was like with primitive tools.

Today when the International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians falls on All Saints Day, how appropriate for us to remember all our brothers and sisters over the centuries and today who have suffered and bled and died and who are suffering and bleeding and dying for Jesus Christ. We are one with them all! Hebrews 13:3 commands us to, "Remember those in prison as if **you** were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if **you yourselves** were suffering." If we were there, we'd want others to be praying for us. 1 Cor 12:26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. Let us not forget them.

But how should we respond when and if we are persecuted? Jesus answered that question in the sermon on the mount where He also told us to expect it. Matt 5:11 "Blessed are you when (not if) people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Say rejoice! Most of us don't automatically respond that way, do we? We push back. We get offended and angry. Jesus said, "No! Bless them." After all, that's what He did. 1 Cor 4:12-13 says, "… When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. Up to this moment we have become the **scum of the earth**, the refuse of the world." And we are **willing** scum and refuse

knowing that if we do not grow weary in welldoing, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up! In Romans 12:14-15, Paul echoes Jesus' words, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn." So on this day to remember our persecuted brothers and sisters, we mourn and pray with them and pray for God's help for them and us both to respond to persecution the way we are instructed.

For Paul tells us in 2 Tim 3:12-17 In fact, **everyone** who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus **will be persecuted**, 13 while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Jesus said expect it, Paul says expect it. He goes on, Vs 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So what are we to do as we remember and pray for those who are being persecuted? Continue to believe and obey the same words they do! The **ancient** words we sang about today! The words written down by faithful eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ and handed down to us over the centuries and translated at great cost into our own language. We take the Bible for granted. Most of us have multiple copies. Men and women literally died for us to have these, "Holy words long preserved, for our walk in this world, They resound with God's own heart, Oh, let the Ancient words impart. Words of **Life**, words of **Hope**, Give us **strength**, help us **cope**, In this world, where e'er we roam, Ancient words will **guide** us Home. Holy words of our Faith, Handed down to this age. Came to us through **sacrifice**, Oh heed the faithful words of Christ. Ancient words ever true, Changing me, and changing you. We have come, with open hearts, Oh let the ancient words impart." And the 4th verse, about Tyndale and others, "Martyrs' blood stains each page, they have died, for this faith. Hear them cry through the years, heed these words and hold them dear!" We at Antioch and in the CBC believe, as did the martyrs throughout history and martyrs today that these ancient words are true and dear and that they point to Jesus in whom we find life! They are the foundation of our faith!

The First Hymn that we sang today echoes these holy ancient words. This is the only hymn we have from the first 400 years of church history. The Greek copy was written about 250 AD while Christians were being bitterly persecuted by the Romans. But it was perhaps composed and sung even earlier. They sang of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost highlighted in our CBC Statement of Faith today. Skeptics had said the idea of the Trinity developed later, but this ancient song proves the Trinity was a firmly held belief of Christians from the very beginning! It calls God the giver of all good gifts coming directly from the book of James. I also encourage us to cry out in

answer and praise to our God! What a treat to sing this ancient hymn about Jesus alongside all these believers from 1750 years ago on this All Saints Day. Even though their voices don't come through the mics today, they are our backup singers! It's probably one of the songs we'll sing in heaven! That great old song Oh For A thousand tongues to sing reminds us of, "saints below and saints above, the church in earth and heaven."

The next Chapter, Hebrews 12 starts out reminding us that all these saints who have gone on before us, all those in Hebrews 11 and all those since, are now in the grandstands as a great cloud of witnesses cheering us on as we run our Christian race down on the track of this world. But the Greek says a great cloud of martyrs. In fact, about 70 million of those in the grandstands were killed for their faith down through the ages. We should remember and be inspired by them when we get discouraged and want to give up. When we want to drop out of the race because it's too long and too hard. Let's remember those who ran it before us even through great persecution. Those who are running it today in prisons and squalor. In Nigeria and North Korea and other places where it's very dangerous to believe what we believe and to live like Jesus. Estimates are that 220 million Christians are at risk of being persecuted right now.

All Saints Day and The day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians remind us that you are not alone, we are not alone. Not in our own time and not in history. Estimates tell us that 2.5 billion Christians are alive today and 8 billion Christians have lived throughout history. Which means 5.5 billion of them are in the grandstands now cheering us on! Oh for a **billion** tongues to sing! I want us to understand today that we are all one church worldwide and throughout all time. Together will all of them, We are the people of the Lord, Chosen by grace, Filled with His praise, We are the army rising up, To Proclaim, The goodness of His name, the God of the Covenant for a Thousand generations! There are **many** other Christians all over the world and there have been many other Christians throughout the ages. And no matter what we may have to face for Jesus, we are not the first and not the last to do so, should Christ tarry, and the same God of the Covenant who gave them courage and who gives the Nigerians and others courage today, will give us courage to stand strong for Jesus. Some people say church is not my thing. You're right! It's not. It's Jesus' body! And He commands us to be part of it if we wish to follow Him! Unlike the skeleton, we do have some-body!

Finally, the last verses of our Scripture today from Hebrew 11 tell us that none of those in the Hall of Faith received what had been promised, but that Vs 40 "God had planned something better **for us** so that only together with us would they be made perfect." We're looking forward, with other believers around the world and with those in the grandstand to the day Jesus will return and when we will all be made perfect together! If you've never become a part of God's great universal church, receive Jesus as your Savior now and join His army rising up as we pray.