Randy Frazee is the senior pastor of the Oak Hills Church in San Antonio, Texas and has written a book called “The Connecting Church.” He has son who was born without a left hand. One day in Sunday School the teacher was talking with the children about the church. To illustrate her point she folded her hands together and said, “Here’s the church, here’s the steeple; open all the doors and see all the people.”

She asked the class to do it along with her, obviously not thinking about his son’s inability to pull this exercise off. Then it dawned her that the boy wouldn’t be able to join in.

Before she could do anything about it, the little boy next to his son, a friend of his from the time they were babies, reached out his left hand and said, “Let’s do it together.” The two boys proceeded to join their hands together and make the church and the steeple.

Frazee says, “This hand exercise should never be done again by an individual because the church is not a collection of individuals, but the one body of Christ.”

This story about the child with one hand illustrates a point made by someone in a Bible study I was facilitating several years ago—the point that all of us are connected. As humans, we are all connected with one another, both now, and with those who have gone before us. This notion of mutual accountability—this idea that all of God’s creation are links in the chain of life, is why we celebrate “All Saints Day.” It is the day we honor those of Christ’s flock who have gone before us and who are with us. On this day we pause to remember one another, and that you and I are part of a long line of faithful folks. These include the “famous” saints we learned about from the history of the church. They also include the not so famous people—a mother
here, a father there. A Sunday School teacher from our childhood who communicated the love of God in words and in Spirit. An older friend who imparted a piece of simple wisdom that has not failed us yet. Someone who believed in us through a time when we weren’t sure we believed in ourselves. Someone from the community who always blessed us by simply making eye contact and smiling at us.

Those who support us reflect the importance of community. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. We need each other in our journey of faith because there will be times when our faith may be found wanting and it is the faith of others that sustain us during these spiritually dry times. In many ways it reminds me of our choir. Our choir consists of a multitude of talent. We have those who sing tenor, bass, soprano and so on. Some can read music and some cannot. Some have stronger voices than others. Yet despite the varied degree of talent among the members, they produce beautiful and transforming music each Sunday. Each voice is important to the whole and they mutually support each other.

Several years ago Paul produced Handel’s Messiah - Hallelujah Chorus for the congregation and invited participants from the congregation to be a part of the production. He invited me as well and we all know I am not blessed with a strong singing voice. Nevertheless, Paul helped me find my voice and I contributed to the final piece that was offered to the congregation. Yes, even my voice mattered and I was mutually supported by the more talented members.
With this in mind, picture yourself as a member of the chorus. Think of the chorus as being analogous to the church. And I ask you to be aware of two things that will be operating as each of us sings our song in the chorus, and you must listen to this seriously and carefully to catch its meaning.

The first thing operating is this: **No one believes it all.** By this I mean each of us in the chorus/church is gifted with only a partial understanding of the mystery of God among us. So, in our large chorus, while one sings with great intensity and assurance, another might sing with little attention and conviction. Or perhaps today we sing the words and melody because we happen to be in a good place, emotionally and spiritually. But, in another time, in another mental or emotional place, we feel doubtful and alienated and we can hardly get the words out of our mouths. That’s okay because as I said, no one believes it all, but together, we sing more than we can sing alone.

And so the saints, you see, are a chorus, a communion, that sings what we individually cannot, and believe those parts we have trouble accepting. They chant the song of faith with us when we can join them, and when we cannot. In short, in this chorus, we mutually support one another, just as the members of our choir support each other.

The second thing that operates is this: if no one believes it all, so also no one **believes all the time.** Our journey of faith is seldom smooth and uninterrupted. At times it fluctuates between belief and unbelief.

When I was in seminary, I did my required chaplaincy at Georgetown University Hospital in Washington, D.C. My ward was primarily the oncology ward in the Lombardi Cancer Center. Most of the patients in the ward were end stage cancer
patients. Once, a four-year-old boy died from the effects of a massive brain tumor. I was with his parents within minutes of his death. I had met the parents during previous visits. On these previous encounters they seemed to welcome my attention and were receptive to prayer and allowed me to pray with them and for their son. Over time I developed a pastoral relationship with them. During one such visit they shared with me that they were very active in a Presbyterian Church in Alexandria, Virginia. So I knew they had a faith life and a Christian community. On the day their son died, after sitting quietly with the parents for some minutes, I asked if they wanted to pray. The mother lashed out at me and said, “We don’t need you or your God now! If your God really cared about my son, he’d be alive!”

I knew this distraught mother wasn’t mad at me and I could easily understand her anger. I could recognize and honor her loss, the loss of her son, and the loss, or at least the shock to her faith. The fact of the matter is that this tragedy had indeed broken her trust in a loving, provident God. I shared this encounter with my chaplaincy supervisor, Father Jim Shea. I asked how we might help the mother spiritually during this dark time in her life. He said, “Stay in contact with them and let them know you are available if they need you.” He then asked if they were practicing Christians. I told him they were Presbyterians. Father Shea responded, “That’s good. God willing, the collective faith of her church will sustain her during her period of grief and unbelief.” What he was saying was that the community—her Christian community, will continue to believe for her. Using our imagery, the saintly chorus will pick up the faltering verses, and, over time, as she slowly encounters these saints within her Christian community, she will begin to see their scars from the trials of life. She will also see they were able to overcome their own
woundedness and sense their resilience. Eventually, they will help her to believe once more, even in the face of tragedy. They will help her to believe in a new and different way. Their unwavering faith will continue to make a joyful noise until she is able to join in the chorus again when her faith is restored.

So you see, no one here—including you and I—believes it all. And no one here believes all the time. No one accepts every verse and no one can sing every note all the time. But the chorus does. The chorus, or the community of saints, sings when you and I are unwilling or unable to do so. They will pray when we can’t. And they will bear us up until that time we can rejoin the chorus.

This has been the case since the inception of the Church. Peter sang for Doubting Thomas until he could believe again. Thomas sang for Denying Peter until he could find his courage again. Monica sang for her son St. Augustine when he was in his period of sinfulness and unbelief until he could repent again. Clare sang for St. Francis when he was sad until he was glad again. Rebecca and Virginia sing for me when I am stuck in my own spiritual wilderness. And Mother Teresa sang for all the lost and rejected of the world until everyone she touched regained some dignity and value. We are a community, and we are a chorus of saints. That’s what we are celebrating today. When we support each other, we become more than the sum total of our individual selves as the Communion of Saints.

Our faith, our hope, and our love are quite incomplete. But this feast day of the saints, of all the saints—past, present, and future, those in heaven and on earth—tell us something. It reminds us of our faith family, that vast community that transcends time
and space. For me, this is a revelation and a comfort. It tells a mighty truth that together we sing more than we can ever sing alone.

AMEN
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