



## From the Pulpit: November 6, 2022

All Saints' Sunday

The Reverend Dr. Katie Snipes Lancaster

Revelation 21:1–6a

*99% Invisible*

November 1 is All Saints' Day in our church calendar across the globe and so we recognize All Saints' Day on this first Sunday after the feast day. For our scripture passage we turn to the penultimate passage in the entire Bible, Revelation 21 for words of hope and promise. This dream that John of Patmos casts for us about our deepest longing.

*Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be God's people, and God will be with them and be their God. 'God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

*The One who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

*The One on the throne said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End."*

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Roman Mars is the voice and producer of the podcast *99% Invisible*. I have long been obsessed. The way some people are obsessed with *Survivor* or *The Bachelor*, I am obsessed with this podcast. I listen to new episodes as they come out. Or sometimes when persuaded, I'll hold off so my husband and I can binge the show together on long car rides (sometimes).

The premise is simple: there are stories just below the surface. "Baked into the buildings we inhabit, the streets we drive, and the sidewalks we traverse" is a universe of hidden design that impacts how we live and sometimes saves our lives without our even noticing.

Roman Mars takes podcast after podcast to remind us that anything from traffic lights to flood mitigation, from cycling lanes to manhole covers have been meticulously designed in order to accommodate, protect, preserve, insulate, and safeguard human life. And there's a story behind every design.

If you go down to the music room after worship to visit Lisa Bond, you have to walk down a staircase. Someone had to think through every detail of that staircase: is it wide enough for exit in case of emergency? Is the handrail sturdy? Are the steps deep enough for someone's foot to be planted firmly? Does the exit have a door that swings outward, and a pushbar that makes it easy to open?

A team of engineers, fire safety professionals, and probably social scientists too, had to come together, designing exactly how a staircase like ours would function.

Another team of engineers worked hard to design the curb ramp at the corner of Kenilworth Avenue and Warwick, so that wheelchairs can safely travel down and across the street, while rain water still adequately flows down toward the storm drains.

And John Sharp knows all too well that it takes a flock of experts and a small army of professionals to ensure that our elevator (elevators he says, double the work) is in working order: there were half a dozen appointments in September alone, just for routine yearly inspections.

All this to say—in order for you to get to the sanctuary today, you passed by dozens, maybe hundreds of design features that are literally lifesaving, or at the very least make life easier for you. And none of us noticed. We thought nothing of it. It takes intentional listening and purposeful study to see the invisible world that Roman Mars sees on a daily basis. But once you see it, you realize that we are forever accompanied by the wise counsel and strategic planning of a host of people who came before us.

Everyday we are chaperoned, piloted, assisted, and escorted by a multitude of the heavenly host, those whose clear-sighted design and prudent preparation made way for us to be exactly where we are.

And it doesn't just happen in architecture and urban planning. Just another small example of how far reaching this great cloud of witnesses might be: the pharmacist who distributes the medication you take daily is accompanied by scientists and biologists who designed the pill you take, not just its contents but its shape, size, and dosage.

We live in a 99% Invisible world. Micro-biologists would remind us that much of the world operates at a microscopic level. The astro-physicists and Nasa scientists who designed the James Webb Telescope would remind you that just beyond what the eye can see in the night sky is a universe of galaxies and luminous objects, ancient pillar-like dust clouds, and still-yet-unknown planetary bodies.

*“And social scientists would suggest that behind and within every human interaction is a deeper psycho-social dynamic that can only ever be partially unpacked.”*

And social scientists would suggest that behind and within every human interaction is a deeper psycho-social dynamic that can only ever be partially unpacked. We go about our daily lives forgetting and not knowing; forgetting that beneath our feet, or just beyond what the eye can see is an entire world that is 99% invisible.

Today we celebrate All Saints' Sunday. All Saints' Day was established in 835, centuries before Protestant churches existed, at about that moment in church history where it seems, there were just too many “official” saints to keep track of. Now every saint could be highlighted on a single day, November 1, without cluttering up the calendar with multiple celebrations every day of the

year. In our tradition, this makes room for a kind of democratizing of the saints. No one person is lifted up as more “saintly” than another in the Protestant church. All are part of the great cloud of witnesses, the saints of light who are just beyond the veil, 99% invisible to us, and yet present nonetheless. The saints are all those who were faithful in their own day, and who accompany us now, surrounding us like a cloud.

On All Saints' Day, we remember those known and unknown to us who have walked the long path of life ahead of us, and have now passed into the great beyond, entered the New Heaven and the New Earth, and now sing an eternal song of love. The saints are 99% invisible. Just beyond our vision. A cloudy, clouded, foggy, often-concealed, unseen presence just beyond the horizon.

Maybe I wear my grandmother's antiquated clip on earrings as a *visible* reminder of the invisible companionship she offers me, years after her death. Maybe you wear your grandfather's watch. Maybe you sit in your grandmother's pew. Maybe you intentionally or unintentionally adopted your mother's mannerism. Maybe you speak aloud your brother's favorite phrases or find a way to keep your friend's inside jokes alive. All in an attempt to make visible the invisible. The saints are 99% invisible and yet their presence is part of this life in distinct and indisputable ways.

We go about our daily lives forgetting and not knowing: forgetting that beneath our feet, or just beyond what the eye can see is the One in whom we live and move and have our being, the Alpha and the Omega, the Prince of Peace. It takes intentional listening and purposeful prayer to find our way to the centered, spiritual place in which we might be open, awake to the presence of God who is accompanying us into the unknown future and into the forever of life by God's side.

*"We go about our daily lives forgetting and not knowing: forgetting that beneath our feet, or just beyond what the eye can see is the One in whom we live and move and have our being, the Alpha and the Omega, the Prince of Peace."*

The same is true of the God we worship. In this life, God is 99% invisible. It is our job to pay attention, to be awake, to open our ears, our eyes, our hearts, our minds to the possibility of the indwelling presence of the spirit of the living God. Chapter 21 of the book of Revelation imagines a future in which "God's dwelling place is now among the people," and yet that is surely true now, just obscured. As the many translations of 1 Corinthians say, "Now we see things imperfectly" "Now we see only a reflection" "Now we see in a mirror dimly" "Now we see through a glass in obscurity." "Now we see through a glass, darkly."

May we be awake, alive to the possibility of God's presence. And may the saints of light, the saints of love, the saints of eternal song be visible to us, go with us, surround us, accompany us. Now and always. Amen.

**—Prayers of the People—**  
**The Reverend Christine V. Hides**

It is truly right and our greatest joy to give thanks and praise to you, Almighty God, the Alpha and Omega, Creator of the universe. We praise you with your people on earth and all the company of heaven, the ancestors and saints who have followed your Son and witnessed to his resurrection. From every race and tongue, and from every people and nation, you have gathered them into your kingdom. You have shown them the path of life and filled them with the joy of your presence.

We pray, waiting and watching, for your new creation, when every tear will be wiped away. We bring to you our joys and concerns and our petitions for loved ones. We trust that you comfort those who mourn, soothe the suffering, guide the hands of healers and caregivers, and are present with us in any need.

On this sacred Sunday, unite us at the Lord's table with those beloved of our fellowship who have passed into your eternal care. We remember their witness:

Mary Allen  
Carol Asher  
Joyce Bottum  
Barbara Bridgewater  
Jo Caldwell  
Edward Cross  
Gail Danielson  
Suzanne Dickes  
Kathryn (Lou) Guthrie  
Jean Herreman  
Harold (Huck) Hindsley  
David Honoré  
Charles Hughson

Mark Iserloth  
Suzanne Kilroy  
Nancy Mack Badger  
Arch McClure  
Elizabeth (Betsy) Moerschel  
Lucie Phillips  
Dick Rinella  
Ronald Rolighed  
Jean Schuessler  
Richard Simonds  
John Simpson, Jr.  
Janet Stiffler-Storlie  
Jane White

Blessed are the dead who die in the spirit, for they rest from their labors, and their works follow them.

For all that these saints and  
the saints whose names we hold in our hearts  
have given us to make us what we are,  
for their love that lives and grows in each of us,  
And for their witness and fellowship that strengthen  
us,  
we give you thanks and praise.  
Dwell within and among us, Holy God.  
Number us among your saints,  
draw those of us in this life closer to one another  
and give us courage and faith to serve you with joy,  
that we might be bearers of your peace and justice in  
this life.

Joining our voices with the vast community of faith,  
we pray the prayer Jesus teaches us to pray: Our  
Father.... Amen.

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