

All Saints Sunday
November 2, 2008
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Most of us don't think of ourselves as saints of God. We sing, "I want to be one too," but to do so would class us among the pious, righteous souls who we assume never seem to have any fun. The world of sainthood seems so removed from our lives that we can't imagine being numbered among so lofty a crowd. Yet, the New Testament reminds us that we are all saints, the pious and the not so pious among us. We have been made, are being made and will be made holy by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

I recall leading a youth camp many years ago where we focused on what it means to be a saint. I have to admit I was amazed at the thoughts of the young campers as we talked about saints and who they considered to be saints. The first conclusion they came to was that one had to die to be counted among the saints of God. Those who received this designation they decided lived boring lives, most in church all the time praying. As the week wore on the campers began to identify saints by entirely different criteria. The apostles, they decided, were a given for sainthood but did they live boring lives of prayer. Well, as we read the stories we discovered their lives were anything but boring. The apostles left the life they knew to follow Jesus. They each took great risks to live into their faith and many died because they chose to be faithful followers.

Paul was the next on their list. A man who had a conversion experience and then traveled around telling his story converting others to become followers of Jesus. Paul preached in the seats of the powerful and argued with those who worshiped other gods. He traveled extensively to preach and teach. Many times his witness landed him in jail, Paul's life did not sound terribly boring instead being a follower of Jesus was a challenge.

How about Gandhi someone asked. Wait a minute was Gandhi a Christian? How could Gandhi be a saint of God? That proved to be quite an interesting discussion.

Martin Luther King, Jr. another challenging life that was not easy as he proclaimed the truth of God's word. A leader in our own country who changed the face of the world by allowing God's love to work through him.

Being a prophetic voice cost him his life. Okay, so being a saint is not as easy as we had assumed.

Finally we concluded that the saints of God are like a sainted glass window. They are those people who allow the light of God to shine through them in brilliant colors.

On this weekend we celebrate All Saints Day. We remember those who have gone before us in faith and who now dwell in a world beyond this one. Those we knew and loved who shared God's love in profound ways that touched our lives. People through whom the light of God shone and invited us to be aware of the graciousness of God.

A question we might do well to ask ourselves on this day is to whom are we passing on the love and graciousness of God? Evangelism has become such an unpopular word that we in the church have formed committees to do "it" for us. Such committees struggle with how to share the good news in a way that will be attractive and allow others to see God at work in our lives. Like most things that come from committees these efforts come across as impersonal and detached.

Studies have for years told us people participate in the life of a church community because someone in the community invited them. People become engaged in meaningful ways with a faith community if they feel they have something to share that will be appreciated. People want to feel connected and needed.

We here at St. John are blessed with a wonderful heritage that has been passed on by saints who settled this area. People like Daniel Batwell who stood his ground and proclaimed boldly that which he believed. John Andrews who founded a school to provide children in York a classical education. Saints like the Arthur Chilton Powell who was considered progressive because he was responsible for the organization and use of a choir during the Sunday liturgy. Canon Paul Atkins whose spiritual leadership changed the attitude of the parish shaped by his abiding love for his fellow human beings.

Numerous men and women who shared their love of the Lord by working to create this holy gem of a building dedicated to sharing the good news of God in Jesus Christ. Generations of people who gave generously of their time and resources to teach children the value of a Christian faith and who reached out to share the love of God with the least among us.

St. John's parish has been blessed to meet the challenges of the time, spreading its influence in the community while inspiring love and devotion among its members.

These are the saints of this parish: patriots, carpenters, judges, teachers, statesmen, artists, professionals, merchants, doctors, nurses, people used by God to shine light into a world in need of love and grace. They are a diverse lot who acknowledged Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Despite their differences they share a commonality - they love.

In all sorts of conditions and changing times they have reflected God's abiding love in some glimmering way to those around them. Sainthood never happens apart from human struggle. I supposed there are saints who have never questioned, saints who never got depressed, saints who never said something they later regret - but I don't know any. It is good to remember we can rely on God's love and grace in our particular situation as God calls on us to be a light in our world.

Today you and I are the saints called by God at this time and in this place to proclaim the good news and to live a life reflective of God's love.

On this day we are privileged to welcome Braylon into the family of God's saints and to celebrate with Bridget and Bethany as they receive reminders of God's love and protection. We invite them to join us in the family of saints by proclaiming God's love to a broken and troubled world.

Which brings me to another truth about the communion of saints, it is not just about a few who have walked before us in this world. I knew a woman whose father made beautiful artistic pins out of shells. When he died she claimed that he was the last crafter who knew how to use shells in this specific way to create works of art. What a shame. You see, when he died the art died with him. My point is that each one of us has a responsibility to pass on the faith that has been committed to our stewardship.

The invitation of Jesus is not to be perfect but to acknowledge God's love for us and our need for God. Faithfulness is living our lives in ways that reflect that love. Faithfulness involves sharing what we believe with those who will come after us as faith bearers. Faithfulness is struggling and overcoming those struggles, Faithfulness is seeking for wholeness.

On this day we give thanks to God for all the saints on this earth and beyond whose lives have connected us to God. May we each share a sense of unity not only with God but with one another for we are the saints of God empowered by the Spirit to be beacons in our own day.