

All Saints Sunday C 2010  
Texts: Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18  
Psalm 149  
Ephesians 1:11-23  
Luke 6: 20-31

“ I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you.” Ephesians 1: 15-16

“For all the saints who from their labors rest, who thee by faith before the world confessed, they Name, O Jesus, be forever blessed. Alleluia, alleluia!”

The Hymnal # 287

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

**Happy All Saints Sunday! I truly believe that this is one of the most wonderful days in the Christian calendar.**

**All Saints Day or All Saints Sunday in this case, is one of the seven principal feasts of the Church, as well it should be. It is a different type of celebration in that it does not celebrate an event in Christ’s life or the life of the Church as is the case in Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost and it doesn’t celebrate a doctrine as in Trinity Sunday. All Saints celebrates something much closer to us in many ways...it celebrates people we have loved and lost and who have gone before us into their heavenly rest. In other words, it celebrates people we know and love.**

**It was first observed to commemorate the martyrs, those in the early church that died for their faith, often in bloody and violent ways. During the Reformation the meaning of the word “saint” was expanded to mean all who were baptized into the faith of Christ and would include those known to us and those known to God alone. In that expansion of the definition of who the saints were, it came to mean those who were alive as well as those who had died.<sup>1</sup>**

**My favorite definition of the word “saint” comes from Frederick Buechner, a Presbyterian minister and theologian. He writes: “In his**

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<sup>1</sup> David Lose at [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)

**holy flirtation with the world, God occasionally drops a handkerchief. These handkerchiefs are called saints.’<sup>2</sup> I love that image.**

**One of the great teachings of the Church is that saints are in all times and in all places. They come in all shapes and sizes, colors and nationalities. They are people we love and know, and they are, often times, people we do not like. It wasn’t and isn’t unusual for saints to have prickly personalities...saints weren’t and aren’t necessarily easy to live with.**

**If the only picture we hold of saints are that they are dead and long-gone, that they are sweet, beatific, and supremely patient, well, then we have missed meeting many saints that have crossed our paths.**

**One of the amazing and amazingly wonderful things about the Church is that she recognizes that anyone, ANYONE, can be a saint. Scoundrels can be saints; sinners are definitely saints. There is not one person that cannot be used by God to shine light into this very dark world.**

**In Sewanee, the main chapel is called All Saints Chapel. It is an absolutely magnificent building and the beauty of the interior rivals any place I have ever worshiped in. The towering stain glass windows tell a most interesting story, they tell the story from creation to the present day.**

**Some of the characters in them are: Adam and Eve (not exactly the most obedient of God’s creatures); Jacob (a scoundrel if ever there was one!); Moses (a murderer); King David (an adulterer and murderer); Henry the VIII, who on his very best days was, to put it nicely, morally challenged; and the list goes on and on.**

**All of the scoundrels and sinners are in the same windows as the saints we have come to know and love. They are in the same windows with Abraham, the Prophets, the four evangelists, twelve disciples, and St. Paul. They are in the same windows as our modern day saints: Teresa of Calcutta, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Desmond Tutu.**

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<sup>2</sup> Buechner, Frederick. *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1973) p. 102

**What is wonderful and very freeing is the realization that the Church does not cover up her scoundrels and sinners. The Church does not ignore the tremendous failings that they brought to their faith and to God's kingdom. It does just the opposite. It recognizes them and points to places in their life where grace was present and where the light and love of God showed through. What is wonderful and very freeing is the knowledge that God's Church is not based on perfection but is based on people; flesh and bone people.**

**We need to know the stories of the saints because their stories are not only our heritage, they are our stories too. Their stories are the community's stories and they connect us to our past, they help us understand our present, and they help us look to the future in hope. We do not walk in faith alone, we have those who have gone before to guide and help us.**

**None of these scoundrels and sinners turned saints have done their work in isolation. None of them could be saints by themselves. Their faith and their failings showed forth in their life within their communities. It could not have been otherwise.**

**There is an old Hasidic tale about a rabbi and some of his students. One evening they were all sitting around a fire when one of the students asked the rabbi what the meaning of community was. The rabbi stared into the fire for a very long time without saying anything. All of them watched as the fire died into a pile of glowing coals. The rabbi got up, took a coal out of the fire and set it aside on the hearth. The students watched as the heat and fire of the coal cooled quickly and then went out.<sup>3</sup>**

**It is in community that our love and passion for God is kindled and kept alive. It is in community that we are helped to live faithfully and fully into God's kingdom. It is in community that we come to realize our inheritance in Christ and how we are to become a part of what is being passed on to future generations.**

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<sup>3</sup> Feasting on the Word: Year C Volume 4. Bartlett, David and Barbara Brown Taylor eds. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 2010) pgs. 233, 235

**In community, we become part of that great cloud of witnesses; we become the ones that generations will look to in hope for guidance for their faith journeys.**

**What is so wonderful about All Saints Sunday is that we are told we do not need to look very far to find those witnesses. Saints are all around us and move in and out of our lives on a daily basis. Many times, those saints come to us in ways and in people we least expect.**

**We do not have to look far to find our saints. I want you to take a minute to look around you. I want you to look at the person next to you. Look at the person in the next pew, both in back and in front of you. Meet one another's eyes. Now, look at the entire congregation. You have just looked into the eyes of the Saints of St. Matthew's. You have just gazed upon saints in the making.**

**Who has helped make you a saint? Who has God dropped into your path that helped you to know God better. Who in their challenge to you, in all their difficulty and cantankerousness, helped you realize your faults and called you to more patience and more humility? Who, of those sitting here today, has been a beacon of God's grace and love to you?**

**On this All Saints Sunday, I hope you will think about them and thank them.**

**Amen.**