

All Saints and Commitment Sunday Nov. 1, 2020

Matthew 5:1-12

Friends, grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus, who is the Christ.

It is cold out here, isn't it? And yet here we are, assembled on this chilly first day of November at my insistence and your consent.

But why? Why did I push so hard for us to gather as long as there was not any precipitation?

Because today IS the day of the festival of All Saints. November 1 is literally the day of that feast and not just the closest Sunday. And because of what this Day means. Especially now during a pandemic that has seen an increase in cases, a rise in hospitalizations and deaths that comes just as we are getting into the season of family gatherings. Family reunions. And that rise threatens our ability to have those gatherings and reunions in the flesh. Because to do so could risk the lives or health of those we love.

We gather outside with our masks on today because All Saints IS a family reunion. It is an assembly of all the saints that make up the body of Christ that is the church- us, those who have died recently, and those who have lived and died in the faith long before us. We gather in the cold because this is the safest and fullest way we can embody the reality that whether we are in person or online- we all are the saints that we celebrate and remember today.

As Christians who happen to be Lutheran, we have a bit of a different understanding about saints. They are not just the “super” Christians who have gone before us- Mother Theresa, Martin Luther, Francis of Assisi, Julian of Norwich- rather, the saints are all those claimed by God through the waters of baptism- made into new creatures in that washing, even as we continue to struggle with our old selves. The ones who believe that they set the rules, not God.

Like any family reunion, we tell stories when we gather. Stories like the one I shared with our children about Noah and the Flood. Stories that acknowledge the good in our ancestors- what a strong and faithful man Noah was, pronounced righteous by God! But a story that also acknowledges where he was less than righteous, that part about his drunkenness that we did not share with our children. Take a look at chapter 9.

As Christians who happen to be Lutheran, we tell the whole truth about those who have died because to do less than that dishonors their memory. The word re-member literally means to “member” someone again. Their members are the parts that make up who they were. We literally put together, at least in our minds, the fullness of who they were. To rebuild them piece by piece. So that we might see them again. And to ignore that Uncle Bill told racist jokes and thought nothing of it, or Cousin Sue was always cranky, or that Joey had a bit of a mean streak when you really ticked him off, to ignore that would be to rebuild someone who was not them. In doing that, we dishonor their memory. Because we also remember that we loved them- because Uncle Bill was the one who would stop when he saw someone by the side of the road, regardless of who they were.

Cousin Sue was the one who always gave the best and most insightful gifts. Joey was the one who always stood up for the ones who were being picked on or oppressed. All those things, good and bad, were part of what made them- them.

As the living saints of the church, we recognize our own shortcomings, those places where- as Martin Luther put it- the Old Adam or the Old Eve who believe they know better than God- pokes through. Places where we substitute our own idea of what is good, and right, and true, of what God calls us to.

Jesus points out some of those places in the Sermon on the Mount. If it were up to us, the kingdom of heaven would belong to those who are filled with the Spirit, who have it in abundance! The “obvious” people of faith. But Jesus says that it is those who are poor in Spirit who will inherit, receive as their very own, the kingdom. Those who literally are so bent over they cannot breathe the Spirit in.

If it were up to us, true Christians are the ones who are sure of their right relationship with God. Their righteousness. But Jesus says it is those who hunger and thirst for that relationship, those who pursue it with the same passion and intensity that they pursue daily bread and water, who understand that without it they will die... these are the ones who will actually be filled. Paradoxical, isn't it. Those who believe they have it, don't. And those who believe they don't have it and so continue to pursue it are the ones who get it.

We remember this day in ourselves and in those ancestors of the faith the imperfections and flaws, because we are constantly reminded that each of those God has called and worked through for the good of the world have been flawed,

and the best of them knew it, and so pursued relationship with God and God's forgiveness and mercy with passion and intensity.

We give thanks this day, for these flawed saints made perfect in Christ. We especially give thanks to God today for the generosity of those who have come before us at St. John. Their generosity has placed us in this position to have that beautiful building which we will get a chance to enjoy again. Their sharing of their abundance in time, labor, and money as they built that parsonage dedicated 55 years ago on November 21. A gift to future generations of St. John and Ely as it housed their pastors. A gift now to us as the sale of that parsonage will pay down our mortgage and ease that responsibility for us as we move forward. Thanks be to God for that generation's generosity and foresight.

We give thanks for their generosity but also are inspired to our own generosity-not for ourselves, but for those who will follow us at St. John, who will have not only a beautiful building, but a renewed culture of generosity to our neighbors who are in need. That the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, and the homeless sheltered.

We give thanks to God this day for the way in which the Spirit has moved in us over the past weeks. We give thanks for the stories shared by Joyce and Jesse, by Addy and the Vogelgesang's and Rose. Stories of sometimes hesitant generosity that blossomed to bless not only those who received it, but those who gave it.

We are excited today as we affirm in the symbol of these Estimate of Giving Cards our commitment to bear the fruit of love generously for our God and our neighbor. Today we affirm, even as those five young women did a month ago, the

faith our ancestors walked in. One that calls us to love God with all that we are and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Today, is a family reunion. Of saints living and dead. One filled with memories and stories of flaws and inspiring perfection. One celebrated with the knowledge that as we worship- we are one, present together right now. One celebrated with the knowledge that through the love of God for us found in Jesus Christ we will see them face to face on that great getting' up day, And now, as we always do at family reunions, let us remember those who were with us last year in person, but who now are with us only in spirit.