

St. Paul's Congregational Church
November 4, 2018, All Saints, Proper 26B
Rev. 21: 1-6a, John 11: 32 - 44

Let us pray: may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

The great celebration of All Saints Sunday is always an especially meaningful worship for me – like you all, I'm thinking about members of my family who have gone before me, all those who have been mentors to me on my faith journey. All Saint's is a bittersweet time as we all remember those we have loved and lost not just this past year but also remembering, savoring, the gifts we have received from our predecessors in the faith. We do stop and give thanks for those whose faith has transformed the world through the ages. Those who brought healing to the sick, justice to the oppressed, welcome to the outcast and compassion to the vulnerable.

Maren Tirabassi has written a poem for All Saints' Day that I share with you now in a spirit of Thanksgiving for the cloud of witnesses who surround us today and always:

God, for all the saints I give you thanks –
For grandparents and godparents,
For doctors and teachers,
For coaches and pastors.
God, for all the saints I give you thanks –
For authors of books that have moved me,
For friends whose advice has guided me,
For strangers who proved an example,
For my children and the children of others,
Who have given me courage.
God, for all the saints I give you thanks –
For those nearest and farthest away,
For those who have died,
And those who are living,
For those who knew they made a difference
And those who never will.
God, for all the saints I give you thanks! Amen.

So often on days like this, full of mystery and awe, music touches our souls in ways words can not. Our hymns this morning tell us the story of All Saints: there is a rhythm, a direction to them. We began with the

majestic “For All the Saints”: looking back on those who have gone before – the statement of faith: “thou in the darkness drear, their one true light.” The acknowledgement that we are all connected: “O blest communion, fellowship divine! All are one in thee, for all are thine.” The challenge to us: “O May Thy Soldiers, faithful, true, and bold, fight as the saints who nobly fought of old.” And the promise: “and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong” – ending with the proclamation: alleluia!

We sing the prayer: “Abide with Me” – through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me. A recognition that God is in the midst of us – our prayer that we allow room in our lives today and always to honor that and live that out.

Then comes the intersection of present and future: one of my all time favorites: the children’s hymn, “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God” suggests that ordinary people, like each and every one of us just going about our daily business, can be saints – those who reveal God’s grace whose faithfulness changes the world: just by how we live! And that message certainly isn’t just for children, is it! Listen to these words:

*I sing a song of the saints of God
patient and brave and true,
Who toiled and fought and lived and died
for the Lord they loved and knew.
And one was a doctor and one was a queen,
and one was a shepherdess on the green;
They were all of them saints of God, and I mean,
God helping to be one, too.*

Our observance of All Saints’ is about inspiration. God asks ordinary people to do extraordinary things: the hymn continues, “they did what is right for Jesus’ sake...prophets, priests, a martyr slain by a fierce wild beast.” We are called to take our places as revealers of the amazing grace God offers – by responding to the needs of the world, letting our light shine so that our world may know that God is alive, seeking beauty, healing, and justice in our midst. You can do this: you can be a model of holiness – you can be a person of stature, grace, and hospitality. You can share God’s healing love and break down barriers of gender, ethnicity, nationality, ability, sexual orientation – the list goes on today, doesn’t it – you can and

you must share this love and compassion throughout the ordinary business of everyday life.

*The world is filled with living saints,
who choose to do God's will,
You can meet them in school, on the road, or at sea;
In church, in a train, in a shop, or at tea;
for the saints are folk like you
and like me, and I mean to be one, too.*

Believe it or not, you can be a saint and not even know it! Just be listening for God's vision for your life -- as your gifts meet the world's needs. As you move into that vision.

Today we need so badly the vision of saints. Greed is rampant, individualism carries the day, violence of words and action is no longer beneath the surface, fears abound, our earth is in the balance as we face the realities of global climate change. We are called to claim our humble role as saints, healers of the earth, for our time and place. Grateful for the courage in years past by the great saints we remember today – and they are all great - we are called to make a commitment to transform our world, faithfully sacrificing for God's reign on earth as it is in heaven.

We gather in a few moments around the Table, surrounded by the eternal presence of the saints and will receive all the nourishment we need to live out our call. I ask each of us to take a moment in prayerful reflection to remember: saints among us, around us, and who have gone before us who still influence our lives. Ask yourself and remember: your saints – those who have shaped your life and world? And then...ask yourself – what kind of saint is God calling me to be? What kind of community of saints is God calling us to be right here at St. Paul's? For God is calling us to action! And, we have the promise that God will be with us on our journey, now and always. We need nothing else! Alleluia! Amen!