

St. Paul's Congregational Church  
 All Saint's Sunday; Matthew 5: 1-12  
 November 5, 2017: *Remember*

Let us pray: may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

The great celebration of All Saints is a bittersweet time, isn't it, as we remember those we have loved and lost this past year – especially when the pain is so fresh - but it's also a time of remembering, savoring, the gifts we have received from our predecessors in the faith. We 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. Others courageously sought justice and loved mercy – those who sacrificed their comfort and lives for God's vision of Shalom. But they didn't do it themselves or on their own – they couldn't. They did it grounded in God's faithfulness –the assurance that God is always with them, with us, and nothing can change that. This observance brings to each of us a challenge too: to realize that we too are part of the great company of saints with a responsibility to share the faith with generations to come.

So often on days like this, so full of mystery, music touches our souls in ways words can not. Our hymns this morning tell us the story of All Saints: and there is a rhythm, a movement 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, sight as the saints who nobly fought of old." And the promise: "and hearts are brave again, and arms are strong" – and the proclamation: alleluia!

Our communion hymn is a lovely prayer: Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether – proclaiming our faith that when two or three are gathered, God is in the midst of us – asking that we be bound together – and the promise, the hope, that we will serve with faith anew."

And now here comes the real challenge:

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 vehicles 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 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, God's call for your life -- as your gifts meet the world's needs. And as you move into that vision.

Today we need so badly the vision of saints. Greed abounds, individualism carries the day, violence is beneath the surface, fears abound, and 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 this church? God is calling us to action! And, we have the promise that God will be with us on our journey, now and always. And we need nothing else! Alleluia! Amen!

Let us join in the Litany of Remembrance as we prepare to honor and hear the names of members of our community who died during the past year:

Litany of Remembrance

**All: For those who lit our lives with joy,  
for those who have touched us with tenderness,  
for those whose loss fills us with longing,  
we give thanks in glad remembrance.**

We celebrate those who have loved us for ourselves,  
looking with acceptance on all that we are, and cherishing us  
without condition or constraint.

**All: Holy God, within and among us,  
we give thanks in glad remembrance.**

We celebrate those who have stood alongside us,  
holding us in the depths of elation or despair, where words of joy  
or rescue fall silent.

**All: Holy God, within and among us,  
we give thanks in glad remembrance.**

We celebrate those who would not let us stand still,  
edging us gently into the open spaces of new understanding  
and delighted exploration.

**All: Holy God, within and among us,  
we give thanks in glad remembrance.**

We celebrate those who have challenged us to grow,  
perceiving all that we have in us to become and daring us to dream  
beyond our imagining.

**All: Holy God, within and among us,  
we give thanks in glad remembrance.**

We celebrate those who have traveled before us, showing us in their persistent courage  
and tenderness how to live in love, and die in faith and hope.

**All: Holy God, within and among us,  
we give thanks in glad remembrance.  
For those who lit our lives with joy,  
for those who have touched us with tenderness,  
for those whose loss fills us with longing,  
we give thanks in glad remembrance.**

Now, on this day of remembrance, let us recall and give thanks for those blessed ones who have gone before us:

Mary L. Melilli

William T. Gilliland, Jr.

John W. Mayrer

John Hesselbirg

Bill Stein

John G. Wightman

Irene Melson

Frank Pavlisko

We light the last candle for others we have loved and lost, both known to us and unknown – for family members, friends, for all victims of violence everywhere. You are invited to lift their names aloud or in silence to God as the candle is lit.

Let us pray:

Living God, we give you thanks for these blessed ones. You have transformed each of these. Keep them forever in your arms. May they stay forever in our hearts. Because of their lives, teach us to live faithfully to your honor and glory forever. In Jesus' name, Amen