

All-Saints

Sinners Who Kept on Going

Frankton – 11/1/15

Scripture: Luke 6.20-31 The Beatitudes

Proposition: We are all saints through baptism.

Today is All Saint's Sunday. The day we read the names of those from this congregation who have transferred their citizenship to heaven this past year. A day to put candles on the altar to help us remember those who have died and have left a hole in our lives. But what makes a person a saint? We think of people for whom special days, hospitals and churches are named after. We might think of people who have made significant contributions to our world, Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Wesley, or Pope John Paul II. We might think of Mother Theresa of Calcutta. We might even include a grandmother or grandfather, aunt or uncle. A bishop of Sweden once said, [SLIDE] "saints are those who make it easier for us to believe in God." Robert Louis Stevenson said, [SLIDE] "saints are sinners who keep on going."

If we look in scriptures for people whom we might consider saints, we might include in our list King David. He wrote so many wonderful Psalms that still give us hope today. He was a powerful leader of his people, leading them to follow the God of Israel, holding in front of them the covenant and promises of God. But when we remember the incident with Bathsheba, the lust and adultery that led to murder, the idea of saint takes on a new dimension. We might think of Rahab, or maybe we wouldn't, the prostitute in Jericho who helped the people of Israel take possession of the Promised Land. She is declared as faithful for her trust in God. She is mentioned over and over again whenever the writers of Scripture want an example of faithfulness. We might think of Peter, the faithful disciple, even with his ups and downs, his declarations of faith and his betrayals. He was the one who declared, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" but also three times said "I do not know him." We might think of people on the list printed in the bulletin even as we remember their failings.

Today's gospel lesson is the Beatitudes. Jesus is declaring what is according to God's order in spite of whatever conditions in which people might find themselves. [SLIDE] *God blesses you who are poor, for the Kingdom of God is yours.* [SLIDE] *God blesses you who are hungry now, for you will be satisfied.* [SLIDE] *God blesses you who weep now, for in due time you will laugh.* [20-21] The Beatitudes praise those who will be fulfilled in their whole being some day. For the children of God, discomfort and pain only reinforce the fact that the Kingdom which is promised is not yet here. We long for the kingdom and are reminded daily that it is not yet here.

In other words, blessed are those who recognize their identity as a child of God, as a saint, declared so by God and who seek to live in that relationship even if they are not always successful. Blessed are those to whom painful and difficult things happen, yet they know that God does not fail them in such difficulty but rather finds them in their pain and gives them hope. To that end, Jan was telling me this week about Joey Martin Feek of the country music duo: Joey + Rory. This husband and wife singing duo have a child with Down syndrome. Joey also now has stage 4 cervical cancer that has spread to her colon. Two things that would be difficult to bear. Yet, Rory, her husband, posted this quote on his blog, [SLIDE] "You can't be in awe of an amazing road that God leads

All-Saints

you down, and then be any less in awe of a corner that he has you turn.” In other words, we shouldn’t give God all the glory for all the good things in our lives and then turn on him when things in our life go south. I think that when we can have that attitude, when we can give God glory and then not turn away when things go south, that’s one of the signs of a saint.

The Beatitudes are promises to all of us today, not simply because we are lacking, or are mourning, but because the very fact of our lacking-ness and sorrows may turn us away from things as they are, toward the Kingdom of God for which we pray. The phrase “Thy kingdom come” takes on urgency and new longing. We weep for those who are ill because we know life is not complete. We are poor because we have heard of the immeasurable riches of which Jesus speaks and we know we do not have them today.

The bottom line is that when you let your situation in life determine who you are, you will have great woe. [SLIDE] But when you let God determine who you are, you will be greatly blessed. Who we are has been already determined – we are children of God, we are saints. If you let your poverty, your hunger, your sadness, and your lack of popularity be the final word about the meaning and significance of your life, you will indeed be in hopelessness and despair. But when you let the Kingdom of God have the final word about the meaning and significance of your life, you will have true joy.

What Jesus is saying is that you are free not to give the world control over you. You are now free not to let your enemies have the final word in your life. When you give bullies more than they demand from you, you show that you are free from their control. When you refuse to let abusers control your life with their threats of pain and death, then you are free indeed from their tyranny. Therefore, we, as Jesus’ disciples, are able to love our enemies, because we know it is God and not our enemies who have ultimate authority in our lives. We are blessed because we trust God above everything else.

We are saints; that fact is made real in baptism. A saint is not someone who by his or her own reason and strength has achieved greatness. Rather, a saint is someone whom God has declared a saint by his grace in Baptism. When we are baptized into Jesus Christ, we are given a brand new perspective on reality – a reality quite different than the reality of the world. The world tells us that only the rich, the self-satisfied, the happy, and the popular are those who are blessed. “Nonsense!” replies Jesus, “You are blessed because I say you are blessed. You are blessed no matter what external conditions prevail in your life, because it is God, and not the world, with the final word about who you really are.” You are baptized, you are saints, may your life reflect this reality.

That is the good news we share this day with all the saints on earth and all the saints in heaven, with all the saints who have gone before us and all the saints who will come after us. We rejoice this day in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. We rejoice that God has called us to sainthood and for having given us a totally new way of looking at life, a way which turns out, in fact, to be the only way there is.

**Saints are those
who make it
easier for us to
believe in God.**

**Saints are
sinners who
keep on going.**

Robert Louis Stevenson

God blesses you
who are poor, for
the Kingdom of God
is yours.

Luke 6.20

God blesses you who
are hungry now, for
you will be satisfied.

Luke 6.21

God blesses you who
weep now, for in due
time you will laugh.

Luke 6.21

**You can't be in awe of
an amazing road that
God leads you down,
and then be any less
in awe of a corner that
he has you turn.**

**When you let
God determine
who you are, you
will be greatly
blessed.**

