

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18
Ephesians 1:11-23
Psalm 149

Feast of All Saints Year C
St. Barnabas Bainbridge Island
Luke 6:20-31
The Rev. Karen Haig

Beloved and Blessed

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, which actually falls on November 1st. The Feast of All Saints falls between two seemingly lesser holy days, All Hallows Eve on October 31st and the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed on November 2nd. Together those three days were once called All Hallowtide which had its beginnings in the Celtic Festival of Samhain. On All Hallows Eve, that's Halloween for us, it was believed that the souls of the departed came home to visit – which is why you see that box of much loved pastels, a doggie treat and a Duncan Hines cake box on our ofrenda. Not making the connection? The pastels were my mother's. She would spend hours painting, drawing, sketching and the pastels are there to welcome her home. The doggie treat is obvious, and the cake box is there because it's Bob's favorite cake. While these things are mementos, they are also things the people we love, loved.

Most of us are familiar with the Feast of All Saints. These days, we've sort of combined All Saints and All Souls, but sometime back, they were distinctly different days. The Feast of All Saints was for the "official" saints – St. Barnabas, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Peter, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Francis, St. Theresa of Calcutta, St. Paul. The feast of All Souls, which falls on November 2nd was the day for commemorating the rest of the communion of saints, all the people whose names are NOT written on the church calendar, but whose names are written on our hearts. Some of you know that I was ordained to the Sacred Order of Priests on November 2nd, the day we commemorate all the faithful departed. I chose that day for my ordination because my mom died while I was in seminary, and it seemed a very special way to honor her profoundly important and saintly role in my life in God. Just like confirmation, marriage, reconciliation and last rites, ordination is a sacramental rite. You know what a sacrament is, right?

A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace ... there is more but for now it is enough to say that the sacrament of ordination was something that changed me in more ways than I will ever be able to describe. The outward and visible sign was Bishop Rickel and priests too numerous to count, laying hands on me. The inward and spiritual grace is the gift of the Holy Spirit pouring into me, filling me with what I need to do the work I've been called to do. Whether it's intellectual or emotional intelligence, patience, stamina, compassion, joy or insight ... whatever it is, I trust I will be given what I need. In all my years of priesthood, that's been my experience. I am given what I need to do what I am called to do. I think the reason that happens is because God is so profoundly loving and gracious. But no matter how much love and grace God pours out, we must be willing to receive God's love and grace, being attentive and humble enough to know that this is pure gift. When we begin to have even the smallest idea of the magnitude of God's love and grace poured out for us and into us, well, it's really hard to take

in. As I lay prostrate on the floor, face down at the feet of our Bishop, I was never more aware of how small and ill-equipped and insecure and vulnerable I was. But I had been promised the grace of being equipped for the work I'd been called to do. And even when I'm up at midnight on Saturday writing a sermon because there hasn't been time until then, I am always given some inspiration, some insight, some gift of a story that reminds me of all of you, and of our life together, and of the reality that God has called us together to nurture and feed us so we can go out into the world to do the same.

That's just what Jesus was doing that day out there on the plain, he was feeding the people who had come from far and wide to be with him, to hear him, to be fed by him. Some of you know these beatitudes, these blessings Jesus speaks over God's beloved people. Luke's beatitudes are a little less recognizable than Matthew's... they are more stark and less poetic. They are spoken from a plain rather than a mountain top and they are profoundly visceral. In Luke's gospel, Jesus isn't talking to the poor in spirit, he's talking with the poor. He's not talking to the one's whose hearts are empty so much as he's talking with the ones whose stomachs are empty. And it's not all sort of ethereal and spiritual. It's visceral, temporal, incarnational. It's flesh and blood people with flesh and blood suffering, people's whose hearts and Spirits are breaking. Luke speaks to them and then speaks to others, saying Woe to you and to you and to you. If we're not careful we can misunderstand Luke's message. He's not saying poor people are blessed and rich people are cursed. That word "woe" is really more like an exclamation point, more like saying "YIKES!" Yikes, rich people, what if your richness is really more of a curse than a blessing because you think your riches mean you have no need of God? Yikes, oblivious people, what if your oblivion is a curse because it keeps you utterly disconnected from the beauty in the people all around you. Yikes, popular and proud people, what if your pride in your accomplishments and your popularity is actually a terrible burden and one that separates you from everything tender or quiet or genuine? What if it means you cannot allow yourself the kindness of honesty and tenderness and vulnerability?

We think of Jesus in lots of ways – teacher, preacher, exemplar... strong, brave, true... fully human, fully divine, beloved and devoted Son, the Messiah, the Christ. Those are only a few of the ways we can think about Jesus. But reading this story today, I'm struck by how profoundly vulnerable Jesus was. I think that's the way he walked around in the world all the time, whether he was calling out scrupulous religious authorities or recognizing the error of his ways with a mother who didn't look like the people he thought he was supposed to care about, a mother who needed his help. Jesus isn't God up on a mountain today, Jesus is God in the flatlands, God with people whose knees wouldn't let them climb up that mountain, God who decided to come to where we are, to be with us and to experience the vulnerability of what it is to be a human among humans who struggle with trying to keep it all together when really, the very best place to be is face down on the floor.

On this All-Saints Sunday, I'm thinking a lot about the Saints – the ones we sang of, the ones whose names we spoke, the ones who are sitting in this room right now. And I'm thinking that

being saintly doesn't have to do with miracles or acts of greatness so much as it has to do with being vulnerable. Because when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, we're recognizing that the only reason we can do what we do, the only reason we have what we have, the only reason we can even draw breath... is because God loves us. God loves us with such abandon that we really, really don't have to work so hard to be all that. I think what makes a saint is complete and utter vulnerability, complete and utter reliance on God. Just like the song says, the saints of God are people just like you and me. We don't need to wait for anything to change in order to know ourselves as beloved and blessed. God has already come among us and the kingdom is already here.

Whenever we recognize our need for God; whenever we hunger and thirst and act for justice; whenever we are merciful or peaceable or pure in heart, whenever we allow ourselves to be vulnerable and let God's love rule in our hearts, we are the saints, the ones who have come to love God's kingdom into being. The saints around us and the saints who have gone before us have shown us the way, giving us countless glimpses of God's kingdom breaking in. As it turns out, saint making isn't our doing. It never has been. Saint making is God's doing. It's God breaking in, God coming among us, God loving us, God offering us kinship and kingdom through our baptisms. To be a saint is simply to recognize ourselves as God's own beloved, vulnerable, faithful and Spirit filled, people walking around in the world living with the sole purpose of loving God's kingdom into being.

You see, it is who we are... not what we do... that makes us saints. Our identity as children of God is what sanctifies us to go and be a blessing in the world. And knowing ourselves to be God's beloved, we go... not because of who we are, but because of who God is. Will we have hard times? We will. Will we feel afraid? Probably. But the more we know God's grace and love and mercy in us, the less we will concern ourselves with needing to get things right. And when we can be vulnerable enough to be utterly present and real, God will fill our hearts with such love that we will struggle to take it in. And that, my dears is how we will go and bless the world. We will go and bless the world when we know it is God working in us, God loving through us, God giving grace. When we really know ourselves to be God's beloved, we will have all that we need to help everyone, everywhere to know their belovedness too. Amen.