

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1:11-23
Luke 6:20-31

All Saints B
St Barnabas, Bainbridge Island
November 3, 2024
The Rev. Karen Haig

Blessed Are You

Today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, which actually falls on November 1st. The Feast of All Saints falls between two lesser holy days, All Hallows Eve and the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed on November 2nd. Together those three days are called All Hallowtide which had its beginnings in the Celtic Festival of Samhain. On All Hallow's Eve, what we now call Halloween, 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 Betty Crocker 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 draw her home. The doggie treat is obvious, and the cake box is there because even though Nadeen is a fabulous baker, "Party Rainbow Surprise" was Bob's birthday cake choice every year. While these things are mementos, they are also things the people and pets we love, loved.

Most of us are familiar with the Feast of All Saints. 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 who don't have their names on the church calendar, the ones who are our own beloveds. Some of you know that I was ordained to the Sacred Order of Priests on November 2nd, All Soul's Day, 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.

Who comes to mind for you when you hear the word "saint?" Do you think of St Francis in the garden, preaching to the birds and reminding us that brother sun and sister moon are as much a part of our family as are our own children? Or perhaps you think of St Thomas, the one who loved Jesus with such ferocity and also the one who voiced everybody's doubts. Maybe you think of Barnabas the Son of Encouragement, or Mother Teresa or Oscar Romero or maybe even St Nicholas, St Patrick or St Valentine.

What makes a saint, anyway? Well, the technical answer is the Roman Catholic Church, of course. A life of pure righteousness followed by 3 miracles after death is what makes for an official church saint, so that's not a group most of us will ever be a part of. Those official kinds of

saints do get their names on the calendar, and people do preach little homilies about them each year. But long before the church started making saints, holy women and holy men were recognized and appreciated in ways that weren't so formal. These were people known by their stories, by the way they lived their lives, people who were held in the hearts and memories of those who saw something very special about them - something we might call holiness or givenness or singleness of heart. I have known, and known of, a lot of saints who don't come anywhere close to meeting those church saint qualifications, and still they are saints whose impact on me has been nothing less than miraculous. These seemingly ordinary people took God's dangerous call to love so seriously that their lives actually became saintly.

I think we make a mistake when we consider a life of perfect righteousness as the mark of a saint, because when we do that, we just might be saying that saint making is up to us. That if we are good – really, really, really good, we might be called a saint. But I don't think that sort of extraordinary behavior is what we need to be paying attention to, because I don't actually think that's the mark of a saint. If you've spent any time reading about the official saints, you know very well that many of them weren't all that well behaved. What made them saintly wasn't their perfect behavior - think of St Peter denying Jesus three times. What made them saintly was their sure understanding of who and whose they were - not perfect people, but authentic people, people who knew themselves to be God's own and willing to live authentically into the life God called them to. It was their commitment to God that made them saints.

Saints are the ones who are more real than perfect. Saints are the ones who make a difference in our lives, who make a difference in all the lives they touch. Saints are the ones whose lights shine so brightly that Jesus comes into focus whenever they're around. Saints are the ones who are so tender and vulnerable that God's love becomes palpable when we're in their company. The saints we encounter in the context of our daily lives aren't necessarily people whose names we'll find on the calendar, or whose icons we'll gaze at in our deepest moments of prayer. We're much more likely to encounter saints on the street, in the grocery store, at the hospital, or around the kitchen table. We know them when we see them because they are the face of Christ, the face of love, for us.

Grounding all our trusting, all our living, all our loving in the God whose name is love is the best good work there is and I think that is what makes a saint. The stories of the saints are not perfect stories, and neither are ours... even the most famous saints lost their tempers, sulked in their cells, yelled at their sisters and brothers and yelled at God too. But they never lost track of who, or whose they were, and they never lost sight of God. Their unmistakable identity as God's beloved is what called them into sainthood. It's what calls us into sainthood too. Beloved and blessed. That's precisely what Jesus was talking about when he spoke to that raggedy bunch on the mountain top. Surrounded by demoniacs and lepers, epileptics and paralytics, sick people

and sinners of every sort, the very first words he spoke to them were words of love and blessedness. Jesus didn't offer up any particular behavior standards, didn't admonish anyone about how to live a perfectly righteous and saintly life. Instead he told them – just as he tells us – that it's simply by virtue of being God's very own, that we are beloved and blessed. That's it. Really. We belong to God and that really is enough to be our everything. It doesn't matter what our worldly circumstances are. It doesn't matter what state our bodies are in. And while it matters deeply that we open our hearts and do all that we can to love as God loves, still, it doesn't matter that we don't always get it right. When Jesus spoke – when Jesus speaks – all are beloved and blessed.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

'Blessed are those who mourn,'

'Blessed are the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers.'

These Beatitudes were never meant to be a list of rules and regulations, not the “attitudes” we're supposed to adhere to at all times – there's not a saint in heaven or on earth who could do that. Instead, the Beatitudes are God's recognition and blessing of God's own beloveds. They are a vision of the kingdom that Jesus said was already here and still in the making. They are the blessing God desires for our lives and for every life. You see, when we recognize how beloved and blessed we are, there will be nothing for us to do but to proclaim God's truth that all are beloved and blessed. Every single one. Yes. Everyone. And when we can take that in and live that out, we are the saints who are loving God's kingdom into being. *Blessed are you*, Jesus says. *Blessed are you*.

As it turns out, 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 know we're impoverished without God; whenever we hunger and thirst and act for justice; whenever we are merciful or peaceable or pure in heart, whenever God's love rules in our hearts, we are the saints come to love God's kingdom into being. It's hard work, loving God's kingdom into being when we are constantly bombarded with vile rhetoric and the encouragement to hate anyone who doesn't spew that same rhetoric, hard work when we're bombarded with civic unrest, racism, sexism, and every other ism you can think of. But for some of us and for our church, all that divisiveness has awakened in us a deep desire to recognize our part in systems that perpetuate such division.

It's been hard work, loving God's kingdom into being during this appalling election season. But for some of us, watching politicians manipulate and lie and do all in their power to keep people from voting has called forth in us a political activism we never would have imagined. We are indeed loving God's kingdom into being in circumstances we couldn't even have imagined only a short time ago and doing that in ways we would never have imagined. Our worlds have been

turned upside down, and still, we rise to do the work of loving God's kingdom into being. Because when we recognize ourselves as God's own beloved, when we experience the riches of God's grace, when we really take in God's boundless love, we WILL walk around in the world with the sole purpose of loving. You see, it is who we are... not what we do... that makes us saints. Our identity as children of God is what blesses us, what makes us holy and sends us out to be a blessing in the world. And knowing ourselves to be God's beloved, we go... not because we are particularly meek or poor in spirit or merciful or pure in heart. We go because Jesus has come among us, has blessed us, and sent us to be his love in the world. Amen.