



We are who we are, at least in part, due to our relationships with those who have come before us. Many and hopefully most of those relationships have been positive, life-giving and loving. But the reality is that not all have been positive. Yet those interactions, too, have helped to shape us into whom we are today. We lose depth and understanding if today we remember only the relationships that were smooth and life-affirming.

All Saints Day and All Saints Sunday is a time for us to specifically and intentionally remember those persons who have helped shape us into who we are today and thus how we understand and live the good news of God in Jesus Christ.

Last week I asked a small group to consider what worship service in the church is most meaningful to each person and why. We didn't have a lot of time to ponder the question so I throw it out to you as well.

What do we do here at St. John's - and for our visitors this morning at your church or in your faith community- that has the most meaning for you and why. What worship service most tugs on your heart and is the impetus for you to remain connected to the body of Christ. Why does that particular worship service speak to your soul? What does that service mean to you in terms of how you understand God? What does that service tell you about how you are to live your life here in Crawfordsville and beyond?

For some, it is Christmas Eve with its candlelight and favorite hymns. For some, it is baptism when we welcome through water and the sign of the cross on the forehead that a person is now marked as Christ's own forever. For some is it a wedding where the joining of two lives together is celebrated. Each of us has some service that reaches deep into our souls and keeps us connected to the body of Christ even when we disagree most strongly on this or that theological point.

Today is that service for some of us. A time when we pause to remember those who have gone before us in death. We will see those persons- often parents, siblings or friends- no more in our life on earth. But each of those persons – and some are listed in our bulletin- have been meaningful to us and have helped to shape our lives. Perhaps you have had the experience of struggling with your Mother or Father and swearing to yourself that you would never say or do something your parent did – and then you hear yourself say or do exactly what your Mother or Father did! We are influenced by those who impact our lives: family, friends, college and other situations.

Nadia Bolz Weber was recently featured on the public radio program “On Being.” She calls herself the “mission developer for the House of All Sinners and Saints” and lives in Denver, Colorado.

She writes about this day:

Today is a day set aside in the church year to remember the saints. But not just the ones who have trading cards since it is technically *All Saints Sunday* and not just *Some Saints Sunday*. To be clear, this isn't like a cult of saints or anything...we don't need special saints to intercede for us because God listens to them more since they were just basically better Christians than we are. What we celebrate when we celebrate All Saints is not the superhuman faith and power of a select few but is God's ability to use flawed people to do divine things. We celebrate all on whom God has acted in baptism, sealing them, as Ephesians says, with the mark of the promised Holy Spirit. We celebrate the fact that God creates faith in God's people, and those people through ordinary acts of love, bring the Kingdom of Heaven closer to Earth. We celebrate that we have, in all who've gone before us, what St Paul calls *such a great cloud of witnesses* and that the faithful departed are as much the body of Christ as we are.

It is quite a thing, really. That we are connected to so many. Connected to so much faith. So many stories. So much divine love. Especially in this day and age of alienation and trying to find community and belonging in smaller and smaller ways. ...[We] ...may think that the basis of ...[our] being connected to other people is in having theology or political beliefs or denominational affiliation or neighborhood or musical taste or Facebook groups in common. But none of that is what connects ...[us] to the Body of Christ. What connects ... [us] to the body of Christ is not ... piety or good works or theological beliefs. It's God. A God who gathers up all of God's children into the church eternal.

So, today let us remember all the deeply faithful and deeply flawed saints of God's church through whom the glory of God has been revealed, is being revealed and will be revealed.¹

Connections. Life is about connections. Jesus brings this home to us in what we call the Sermon on the Mount and the subset, the Beatitudes. As teacher and rabbi, he preaches from a place of prominence- the mount- which might remind the people of his day of Jesus' connection back to Moses. A reminder that Jesus did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. To help us see the connections between God's love for us and God's desire that we spread that love to all- not just to the wealthy but to the poor. Not just to the comfortable but also to those who lack shelter or food or simply human companionship.

Moses went up to Mount Sinai and came back down with the law- the Torah- the teachings- that Moses received from God. Those teachings became the basis for how we live in community with each other and as children of God.

The Hebrew word for blessing- 'ashar- can also be translated to mean “to find the right road.”² Jesus spoke to an audience for whom scripture is what we call the Old Testament. And the

¹ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2013/11/778/#ixzz3HoCL4mzi> (Nov. 1, 2014)

Beatitudes reflect that. The Beatitudes in their emphasis on how to live a life that pleases God are derived from the Psalms, Isaiah and Hosea among other Old Testament texts. Jesus comes not to abolish the law but to show us how to fulfill the law through our actions and our relationships with others. The saints we remember today can also serve as guides as we remember their lives and how they are so often a blessing to us.

Each Sunday we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The resurrection that we celebrate through partaking of the bread and wine reminds us that death does not have the last word. The saints we remember today remind us that even though individuals that we love have gone before us, they are still with us in the great cloud of witnesses. Our music for this day is full of life and love and the assurance that God is with us, in good times and in times of change and challenge. Our God is with us when we mourn and when we are comforted. Our God has made us the new creation through life and love.

Today we sing some of the most wonderful hymns in the Christian tradition. “For all the saints”, “Ye watchers and ye holy ones” and “I sing a song of the saints of God.” We will sing at the end of the service “Ye holy angels bright.” Each of these hymns remind us that saints are people like us – our world is filled with those who love the Lord and strive to do God’s will in this world. Today is also a day when we remember how important music and song are to our worship of God, whether we have trained voices or we croak like frogs. The psalmist writes:

Be joyful in the LORD, all you lands; *
serve the LORD with gladness
and come before his presence with a song.
Know this: The LORD himself is God; *
he himself has made us, and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving;
go into his courts with praise; *
give thanks to him and call upon his Name.
For the LORD is good;
his mercy is everlasting; *
and his faithfulness endures from age to age (BCP 729).

I pray that you leave here today with lightened hearts and a tune in your mind that will bring you comfort this week. May this be a day when your memories of the saints in your life, the hymns we have sung and the words of Psalm 100 bring you comfort, peace and the grace of God.

Amen.

² Earl Palmer in Feasting on the Word, Year A. vol 4 (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011) 238.