

Sermon November 1st, 2020

God Is Right There in the Middle of Our Saintly, Messy Lives

Today we commemorate All Saints Day. A day where we remember those who have gone before us who lived their lives with faith. People who reflected Christ's love and grace with their words and their actions. People who showed amazing belief in God's presence even during really dark times. Some of them we knew personally, and were direct recipients of this love and grace. Some of them, are mentioned in our Bibles, or in other church writings. Through hearing their stories, we become recipients of this love and grace.

All Saints Day is also a day where we recognize that we all identify as children of God who have saintly qualities within us. Sometimes, we compare ourselves to others like Mother Teresa (**Image**), or the Apostle Paul, or Francis of Assisi, and think, we are nowhere near as saintly as they were.

Yet, our readings this morning reassure us that God is standing before us today on All Saints Day saying we are all saints through Christ Jesus. We all have moments in our lives where we reflect Christ's love and grace to others. We all have received the gift of faith.

Now, as we remember the Saints of the past. As we recognize our own saintliness. Two theological challenges come to the surface for me. First, if we are all saints why do we still have the potential to hurt people? Or in other words, why are we still sinners?

Throughout my own childhood, I believed that saints were extra ordinary people who lived pious lives. They didn't sin. They didn't suffer from self inflicted wounds. Their suffering was often unjust. Sometimes we see the people in our own lives that came before us in this saintly way. We can't imagine ever being as faithful as grandma (**Image**) was or as mom was or as grandpa was or as dad was.

When I came across some of Luther's writings in seminary, I started to realize that no one that God has chosen to be examples of faith for us are perfect. All fall short of the glory of God. Sometimes, we don't have access to these broken parts of them, and so, we don't get to see the whole picture of someone's life. We put them on a pedestal, which then makes it harder for us to relate to them. To see that we too have the potential of impacting our world in ways similar to the saints that came before us.

Sometimes, we do see their brokenness, which then challenges our definition of what a saint is. Sometimes, this brokenness makes it harder for us to see them as a saint or as someone who is a good example of a faithful person for us to follow.

Sometimes in the midst of this understanding of one being either a Saint or a Sinner we become blinded from being able to see the love of Christ being lived out in people who show their sinner self from time to time.

Luther changes that all for me when he talks about us as Saint and Sinner. That we have the potential to touch people with the love of Christ, and we also, have the potential to hurt the people we love. According to Luther, as people of faith we are called to get up every morning and pray (**Image**) that this day our saintly qualities will impact people more than our sinful qualities. Then at the end of the day we repent for those times where our sinful qualities seemed to take over, and give thanks for those moments where our saintly qualities impacted the people we love in a positive way. Then we hope for a better day tomorrow.

The point Luther is trying to make here I think is that everyday we have moments where people experience Christ's love through our words and actions. And we have moments where they don't experience Christ's love through our words and actions. But, throughout the day, God is still right there in the midst of our saintly and messy words. In the midst of our saintly and messy actions. Forgiving us when we fall short. Healing those that we hurt through our repentance and renewed words and actions. Lifting people up, redeeming them, when those saintly qualities God created in us do impact our words and our actions.

This is the second theological challenge I reflect on when we commemorate All Saints Day. Where do we see God's presence in the midst of the saintliness and messiness of our lives? Is God present in our saintliness and absent in our messiness? Or is God present in both? And if God is present in both, where is God standing? On the margins of our lives or in the center of our lives? And if God is standing in the center of our lives, what is God doing to help us be saintlier than messier?

In our readings this morning, we see other's reflections of where they believe God is, and what they see God doing to make them saintlier. For John who is a prisoner on an island for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, he sees a vision where Christ is front and center in our lives taking care of us like a shepherd cares for their sheep, and robing us in white (**Image**). Redeeming us from this broken world. John's faith in this moment gives him the motivation to share this vision with all of us. Reflecting Christ's love and grace to readers of this letter in all times and places.

What I hear when I read this is that in the midst of our suffering. In the midst of our brokenness. Jesus reveals himself to us through the love and grace of God's Word. According to John's letter, to be a faithful person, to be a saint, is to be able to see God standing right there in the middle of our lives doing something to redeem us from our suffering. Doing something to encourage us to reflect Christ's love and grace to others.

Sometimes, we struggle to see God at the center. Sometimes, we speak and act like God isn't at the center of our lives. That is the sinful nature within us. But, the gift of faith we receive in Christ Jesus, seems to always wrestle our attention back to the one who created us. Back to the one who redeems us. Back to the one who sanctifies us. Back to the one who moves us to reflect Christ's love and grace to others in our world. That is the saint in us.

In our gospel this morning, Jesus delivers a sermon to his followers that drives this point home. Blessed are those who are living in this broken world, because the kingdom of heaven is yours.

I don't know about you, but I find that it is in my brokenness that I pour more attention and energy into seeking out where God is in my life, and what God is doing to pull me out of the fire. I think what Jesus is saying here is that we are blessed, or fortunate, because in the midst of our brokenness. In the midst of our suffering, we end up seeing God. We end up seeing that God is front and center in our lives, and that Christ is Shepherding us through this suffering. That God will clothe us in white redeeming us from our suffering. That God is working in and through us to be reflections of Christ's love and grace to others in our world. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness (**Image**). Blessed are those who are merciful. Blessed are those who are pure in heart. Blessed are those who are the peacemakers. All characteristics of Christ that we inherit.

And so, as we commemorate the Saints that came before us. As we recognize one another as Saint and Sinner. We also, believe that God is front and center in our lives, even in the midst of the messiness of our lives. God does not abandon us, but breathes new life into us when that sinner identity seems to show up. Jesus flips our narrative upside down redeeming us instead of condemning us, bringing us forward into a new world where we physically see that God is front and center in our lives. Redeeming us. Robing us in white (**Image**). Empowering us to live as Jesus lives. Empowering us to live as the Saints before us lived.

Let us pray, redeeming God, we give thanks that you have created us with saintly qualities. That you have given us the Holy Spirit to continue to do saintly things in our lives. We give thanks for all the people in our lives who have touched us with your love. Who have been examples of faithful people for us to follow. Call us to repentance when we fall short. When that sinner part of ourselves rears its ugly head. Breath new life in us, so we can continue to impact people in saintly ways. **Amen.**