

Sermon, All Saints Sunday, Luke 6:20-31 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

Today we celebrate the feast of All the Saints. This can be confusing, because we might think of saints as people who have died, and while we certainly acknowledge many such saints in the Episcopal church, death isn't a prerequisite. In addition, the way we commonly use the word "saints" as Christians is different than the way it's used in our popular culture. Our culture often uses "saint" to describe people who are extraordinarily well-behaved. "Not me, I'm no saint," we might say or hear. But to Christians, all Christians are saints. We make people saints when we baptize them. So, saints can be capital-S Saints like Peter, Paul, and Mary; or they can be ordinary saints, like those we have been hearing about for the last month during our ordinary saint talks. If you missed any of these talks, they are available online on our Web site. Some of ordinary saints described are members of this church. We are called to be saints to each other. We are the saints of St. David's.

All Saints' Sunday is one of the four best days for baptism, and we are blessed to have a baptism today at our third service. Because All Saints' Sunday wasn't quite complicated enough, here at St. David's we decided to also make it Ingathering Sunday a few years ago, and it worked so well that we stuck with it; so in addition to celebrating saints dead and alive, ordinary and capital-S saints, we also collect pledge cards on this day. This year, we decided to add one more thing as well: the Ministry Fair. We'd gotten away from this the past few years, trying instead to have several small fairs over the summer; but we're bringing it back this year, on a major feast day, because the ministry fair is a perfect complement to a day when we celebrate saints.

Our hope was to create an integrated program, where we could all take the gifts discernment work from our Wednesday night program and use that information to find ministries that would transform us. I hope that's how it works for the twenty or so people who were able to participate on Wednesday nights; but what about for the rest of you?

You may remember that the saints in our windows in the foyer showed up about a month ago, as part of this Wednesday night program and gifts discernment. Each window represents a capital S saint who, through strengths as well as challenges, can help us discern what gifts we might want to cultivate at this time in our lives. Even saints with a big S, like Saint Peter, have challenges. That won't be much of a surprise to many of us, who might associate Peter less as the mythical guardian of the pearly gates and more with the biblical figure who heard the cock crowing three times the wee hours after Jesus was arrested, and came to terms with his own cowardice and failure. Peter was the rock upon which Jesus built his church, but Peter was deeply flawed. He was also full of passion and eager to prove himself to Jesus. Gifts and challenges, which all of us saints have.

So, if we are all saints, and we all have flaws, what can we take away from All Saints Day? What do these readings have to teach us?

In Luke, we have the Sermon on the Plain. This is a variation of the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. A major difference between these two Gospel readings is that in Matthew's version, we didn't have the "woes" to go along with the blessings. "Woe to you who are rich now." "Woe to you who are laughing."

If we take this passage as a map for becoming a saint, we'll miss the point. Saints are not required to be poor and hungry and weeping. Laughter is not a sin. In this passage, Jesus is offering hope to those who are poor and hungry and weeping now.

The last verses in today's reading are ones we all struggle with. "Love your enemies." If you try to tell me that you have that one nailed, I will be suspicious. Think about enemies. Maybe you don't have personal enemies, although if that's true, you may not have many friends, either. Interacting with people, we are going to rub some the wrong way, and they will rub us the wrong way. Enemies may not be people who have harmed us: they might be people who have harmed someone we love. Somehow, that can often be even harder to forgive.

Enemies might be something larger: people who are on the opposite part of the political spectrum. Or, people who wish harm to our country. Who are your enemies? We're supposed to *love* them and do good to those who hate us. I think about that in terms of prayer sometimes. For example, when someone commits a mass murder, such as flying planes into buildings, or a mass shooting in a church or school. Many will jump in to add the names of the victims to the prayers the following Sunday, but adding the name of the perpetrator or perpetrators is much more jarring. And yet, we are called to do that. Jesus says, "Pray for those who abuse you."

I need to add something here, especially with the word "abuse." Many Christian spouses over the years, as well as members of oppressed communities, have remained in abusive relationships because of the way preachers like me have talked about passages like this. I am not advocating that. Better to pray for those who abuse us from a distance. Jesus does not say, "Stay with someone who abuses you." He tells us to love them and pray for them. Turning the other cheek isn't a sign of weakness, but it shows that their violence has not broken us or changed our Christian values. This does not always mean physical violence, either. If someone speaks to you abusively, this passage is not telling you to just take it. Turn the other cheek and let him or her know that their behavior is not acceptable. And then pray for them and love them from afar. It's another form of perseverance, as we heard about a couple of Sundays ago.

We became saints at baptism, but we will grow into our sainthood for the rest of our lives. Hopefully we won't flee from our call to discipleship and saintliness like Jonah did, but these calls to love our enemies, to pray for those who abuse us, are going to take work for the rest of our lives.

Today, we celebrate all the saints, and the gifts of all the saints. We will collect pledge cards, and that will help the vestry make plans for how we will serve our church and our neighborhood next

year. I hope you will all attend the ministry fair and pledge your time there, and discern how you can use your gifts for the church and the neighborhood.

How are you going to live out your sainthood?

[11:15: And now, we will share the deep blessing of making a new saint together.]