

“The Communion of Saints”

November 5, 2017

#blessed series – All Saints Sunday – Holy Communion

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Did you notice that phrase “the communion of saints?” Last week, we focused on Faith Commitment as we offered our prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. Today we celebrate faith commitment again as honor our saints.

Maybe it helps to think of All Saints Day as Christian Memorial Day. How would you describe a “saint?” I’ve heard a few phrases that I like: They are people who continued what Jesus started. They have shared their faith honestly in word and deed. But my favorite definition for a saint is this: **after knowing them, you feel like you know God a little bit better.**

They are those people who have lived out what Jesus told us to do: love God and love your neighbor. They’ve shown us that a relationship with God is vital. They have been faithful stewards of their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness. They’ve made a relationship with Jesus a priority, and it’s made a difference in our lives.

Even as we name them “saints,” we know that the word “saint” isn’t something our loved ones earned or sought out for themselves. To be a saint is a gift of God, and the people we call “saints” remind us, most of all, of God’s grace. Friends, a saint is a child of God. Even as we celebrate those who have helped us to know God a little bit better, we claim that role for ourselves. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we are children of God who are givers of grace to the world.

That’s not a bragging rite or a cause for feeling holier-than-thou or self-righteous. It isn’t a cause for pride. If anything, it’s a challenge for each of us! Consider that you and I might be the only example of Jesus that some people will ever see. So, the stakes are high! This is vital work!

Saints remind us that being a Christian isn’t just automatic where God simply takes care of us, but being a Christian is a partnership with God where we respond to God’s grace.

If you're familiar with Twitter, you know that people can "tweet" in short messages - just 140 characters. A lot of people use *#blessed*. When I looked this week, *#blessed* had a lot of different ideas: a picture of someone’s new car, sports celebrations, a new baby, getting a job, someone finding \$5 in their pocket. **So what does it mean to be blessed?** When do we use that word and claim God's blessing in our lives?

In the spirit of “tweets,” I offer us the words of First John: *See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

The writer of First John wants us to know that we belong to God and are loved by God. This letter was sent to a community of both Jews and Gentiles, so it’s important for them to hear that wherever they come from, **now they are children of God.** Regardless of their ethnic heritage, God claims them all. Friends, we need the same reassurance that we belong to God. We don’t all look alike or sound alike or act alike or agree on certain issues, but we are children of God.

And the writer of First John reminds us to follow Jesus closely. As children of God, we seek to do as Jesus did. We seek to act like Jesus acted. We live this earthly life knowing that there is something more when we die. “We do not know exactly what that life will be like, but we know enough about it to know that we are to be like Christ, and so we must focus on being like him now and living a holy life.”

That doesn’t mean that we are perfect, but it does mean that we’re going onto perfection – growing closer to God and seeking to be faithful every day. The life of a saint isn’t a perfect, problem-free life. When I think of my “saints,” they exemplify strong faith that endures in hard times, trust God for help, and thank God always. They are devoted and dedicated to God. They glorify God with their lives.

That phrase “the communion of saints” reminds us that we’re not alone. It also reminds us that faith is one of those things we can’t do on our own. We need each other. Living a life of faith in Christ is about our decision to respond to God’s grace that is always present and available. Living a life of faith in Christ is about having a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. But living a life of faith in Christ is also about being with others in the Body of Christ – in the church – because we need one another’s support in worship and fellowship.

I felt it powerfully this week as I asked for your prayers for my sister who went into the hospital. I knew that as soon as I sent that message and asked, people were praying for her – and for me. I had texts and calls from you wanting to know how she was and how I was, and it was a gift to me.

In an interview on the Today Show many years ago, Maya Angelou, a contemporary African-American writer, was asked what was on her wish list. After everything she had accomplished in her life, what was left for her? Was anything still unfulfilled?

She said, “Oh, my Lord, yes. I want to become a better writer. I’m very serious about it. It’s what I am. It’s how I describe myself to myself. And I want to be a better human being. I’m trying to be a Christian, which is no small matter. I mean it – I’m

always amazed when people walk up to me and say, 'I'm a Christian.' I always think, 'Already? You've already got it? My goodness.'"

Now I'd claim the name "Christian" for myself, but I understand Angelou's point, too. The saints teach us that faith in Jesus Christ is a lifelong process. However long we live, we're on a journey with God to be more faithful, more committed, more of a disciple. And we're on the journey together.

When we say our creed, we say that we believe in "the communion of saints." We believe that the saints are with us. When we gather for worship, the communion of saints are with us. Around this Communion table, the communion of saints join us. When we pray "with your people on earth and all the company of heaven," we join our voices to sing God's praise with all the saints, living and dead. As we come to the table, we trust that those who have gone before us in faith and who have formed us in faith are among those who feast with God for eternity. This holy time connects us with them in a special way.

Around this table, those words from First John are so very real: "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" God's love is what counts – whoever we are, wherever we are on the journey of faith – God's love is what counts! And because God loves us, we're called to love God and love others with grace and mercy.

Someone said that "the feet of saints are as much of clay as everybody else's." The reason they are saints is not because of what they did but because of what God did through them. We are blessed by them because God's Spirit lived in them and worked through them. The saints have shown us that great love of God and inspire us to claim it for ourselves.

Friends, God loves us. We can look to the future – even to our earthly death – with hope for what is to come when we meet God face-to-face. The saints have shown us what it means to live with hope. Because of them, our faith in God is stronger, our trust in God is deeper, and our hope in God is alive and well. Because of them, we call ourselves "blessed."

As we prepare to come to the table and receive this holy meal, I invite us into prayer together...