

“Building a Strong Family of God: Yield in Love”

October 31, 2021

All Saints Day, Faith Commitment Sunday

What does the word *yield* mean to you? Maybe you thought of a yellow light or a red and white traffic sign. When we're learning to drive and as we travel, yielding is an important skill, and sometimes it's a dance of sorts when we come to a 4-way stop at the same time or when we're not sure whose turn it is next. We yield a lot - for safety's sake.

But the word *yield* also means what is produced or provided - like what land yields. My brain was stuck on yielding as waiting or watching before I move ahead, which led to thinking about giving up or letting go - even surrendering for the sake of someone else. And certainly, there's truth to that as we consider how we follow Jesus - to yield in love. But there's something about what we offer, too.

As we conclude this series focused on building a strong FAMILY of God, *yield in love* is a beautiful phrase that reminds us of both how we care for each other and how we offer ourselves for God's Kingdom-building work. Yielding to others may not be our first response. We may have a tendency to push through, but faith in Jesus challenges us to think about others first.

And our faith also promises that God sows seeds in us to produce and provide a way for others to follow him. We want to be fertile ground where God can grow deeper faith and trust. We want our lives to reflect God's goodness and grace. But yielding is hard work. As we're remembering the saints, *yield in love* is a powerful word about those we remember and who we're called to be.

I love this chapter in Romans 12, and it's hard to just choose one part of it, which is why we read it all today. Paul's words echo Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount and doesn't shy away from offering the challenge. One commentator writes, "This passage is not a greeting card slogan, but a call to costly discipleship." This is about how we treat one another in the church family and also how we treat those who aren't in the church. It starts here. It starts in our homes, our workplaces, our encounters with strangers, and even those we don't like very much. How does this speak to us as we think about those whom we would call the saints?

All Saints Day is a really important day - like a Memorial Day for Christians, but it's not an end in itself. We celebrate the saints who showed us and taught us about faith in Jesus, and their witness challenges us to consider our own witness. Do people know whom we follow? Do others know that we believe in Jesus Christ - Lord and Savior

- not simply because of what we say, but by how we speak and act? Do they know it by our love?

Paul is clear in this letter written to Christians in Rome. This is about sacrifice and humility. We are a part of the whole, and we all belong to each other. We all have gifts to use, and we should use them to the glory of God. And we shouldn't pretend, but we should be authentic. Our faith is personal; we have a personal relationship with God. But we also have a responsibility to care about who God cares about - the whole world.

And did I mention that Paul talks about humility - *don't think you know it all!* Humility is key in our life of faith. Love is active and generous. Love calls us to yield to Jesus with all that we are and all that we have.

Paul isn't simply offering us a to-do list, but he's describing a lifestyle of how we live every day in response to God's mercy. Growing in faith and living our faith in Christ means that we fight the desire to conform to the world. There are beautiful things, but there are many things that aren't the way of God like fear, hatred, and greed - the very opposite of active love that Paul describes. By the way, Paul is talking to church people.

Roman Christians were facing a specific issue about how to treat refugees who were returning to Rome. Many of them had been oppressors of Jews. So, there was resentment, which is why Paul addresses how we treat one another even when there has been conflict. Being transformed in Christ calls us to a higher response - to forgive and seek peace with one another and to live as those who follow Jesus. It's messy, hard, and inconvenient, and it's right where we're called to be.

But this idea of being a "living sacrifice" is not familiar. It means that we offer ourselves to God. Pastor Mike Slaughter offers a great illustration about living sacrifices. He says that we offer ourselves just as if we put ourselves on the altar before God. The problem is that a living sacrifice can be easily distracted. We can come down from the altar when we see something that gets our attention - and takes our attention off of God.

So, Paul's goal is to remind Christians in Rome to keep their focus and attention on God. That's where the call to humility, authenticity, and integrity comes back around. Our social situation may not be the same, but there are plenty of opportunities for us to come back to God - or at least draw closer to God and one another - remembering that love is a powerful force. Yielding in love for others and offering love to others is key to who we are. And when we remember the saints, we're encouraged by their walk with God.

We can take comfort in "the communion of saints." The creeds of the church - statements about what we believe - 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 is with us. Around the Communion table, the communion of saints joins us. When we pray “Our Father, who art in heaven,” we join our voices with all the saints, those who have gone and those who are living still.

We’re not alone, and we’re not called to do grow in faith alone. These letters to early Christian communities are written to groups of people. Faith isn’t lived in solitary; we can’t do it on our own. We need each other. We need each other to find strength. We need each other to build a stronger family of God. Right now, it’s different as we’re gathered together here and online, but it’s God who brings us together.

This is personal - and it’s social. 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. Paul’s challenge is clear - that God’s love is what counts – whoever we are, wherever we are on the journey of faith. 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. They showed us what it means to yield in love - to step back, take stock, trust deeply in God’s care, and allow God to work in us to produce good fruit. The saints practice “whole life stewardship” - reminding us that nothing is out of God’s reach or care. God cares about all of the gifts we can share, and we’re called to be stewards. We can offer it all to God in trust.

I heard that this week from one of our saints who is living with illness that has no cure. She spoke of trust and love - and the assurance of God’s presence with her and her family. All through this time of struggling, she’s lifted up love as a powerful force. She’s been quick to pray. She’s been intent on sharing stories and giving thanks for her life, her family, her marriage, and faith that has been a firm foundation. It’s been a powerful witness to me - to hear her speak to God’s presence and care.

You and I are here because beloved saints have walked and talked their salvation story, and our lives have been changed! We are more faithful because of what they said, what they did, how they lived, and even how they died knowing the love of Jesus Christ. I saw this in a woman who died this year. She was a part of the first church I served. She lived her faith boldly. Even as she was dying, her faith was clear even when she couldn’t speak.

Saints show us that following Jesus is a partnership with God where we respond

to God's grace. That doesn't mean they're perfect. The life of a saint isn't perfect or problem-free. When I think of my "saints," I think about their perseverance and willingness to yield in love. They exemplify strong faith that endures in hard times, trusts God for help, and thanks God always. They glorify God with their lives and have shown me what it means to live with hope.

Because of the saints, our faith in God is stronger, our trust in God is deeper, and our hope in God is alive and well. And so, we respond in faith. We carry their faith with us. It's not lost - look at the light that shines brightly! We find courage in their walk with God. We light candles in honor of them because they shared the light of Christ with us. Because of them, we know God better. Because of them, we will be called saints by those who come after us.

Just as we celebrate those who have shared their faith and now rest with God, God is inviting us - imploring us - to do the same. That's the challenge of this day - yielding in love. We're called to active love - making sacrifices and trusting God with what we have. We're called to yield in love - remembering the love of God yielded for our sake and the yield that comes from God's grace at work in you, me, and all who seek God. Yield in love - with humility and hope - and watch what God will do.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.