

The St. John's Pulpit

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A FUTURE NOT YOUR OWN

Gospel of John 1-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Revelation 7:9-10, 16-17

All Saints' Sunday

Tenth Sunday in Kingdomtide, November 5, 2017

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A few months ago, adult siblings were sipping coffee around the dining room table. They were reviewing the memorial service for their father scheduled on the next day. They chose the scriptures and decided to sing the hymn, “*Jesus Christ is Risen Today.*”

On this All Saints' Sunday, these siblings count their father among that great cloud of witnesses, saints of yesterday and ages ago, who believe Jesus revealed a God of peace, not anxiety, worry or trouble; a God of relationship, not separation or abandonment. But, did their father only become a saint upon his death?

What is a saint? Who is a saint?

1. In the early Church, the word saint referred to any person committed to follow the teachings of Jesus. Someone in whom the Word of Christ was alive. In time, ‘saints’ was expanded to include those who passed on into the realm of heaven and the living saints. In the centralized period of the Roman Church, the practice began of venerating some deceased believers – or revering them - as ‘saints;’ viewing them to have value between angels and humans.
2. After the Protestant Reformation, saints – living or dead – unknown or well known – were viewed to be imperfect beings like the rest of us. Almost 500 years ago, Martin Luther expressed such an understanding: “*This life, therefore, is not godliness but the process of becoming godly... We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way. The process is not yet finished, but it is actively going on.*”
3. Our scripture passages of today were written to offer hope and encouragement to the saints of the early Church. They are attributed to John. The saints of the early Church were learning how to relate with God through grace rather than law and discovering how to envision life eternal as God’s gift rather than a reward to be earned. Jesus did not want his followers to be afraid.

The God Jesus reveals to you does not want you to be troubled about your future.
God views you as saints now and that will not change beyond this life.

Toward the end of Jesus’ ministry, he encouraged them with words of assurance: “*Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.*” (Gospel of John 14:1-3)

I like the definition offered by a third grader who was asked to define 'saint.' She remembered the saints in the stained-glass windows of their church sanctuary. So, she said, "*A saint is a person who lets the light shine through.*"

A saint lives by the prayer, "*Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as in heaven.*" As saints, you know God is not lurking around behind the scenes waiting to be called to intervene. God is involved in every situation weaving every well-intentioned and imperfect action as we pursue the kingdom of God and the will of God.

The ministry of Jesus was not a three-year trial experiment; it was the eternal revelation of God's relational nature and vision for planet earth. The only way we can influence the world to reflect God's kingdom is for us to be influenced by God's kingdom vision. As Ministers in Daily Life, we do not merely offer a view of God in the world; we offer a relationship with the Living God of love, hope and grace.

Even when you walk through suffering or grief or tremendous challenge, God is with you. As the early Church was persecuted for following Jesus, these words from Revelation were written to encourage them: (Revelation 7:9-10, 16-17)

"I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!' They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The diversity of the saints in the vision of Revelation emphasizes the variety of gifts necessary for the work of God's kingdom to be fulfilled. All their needs were met and there were no more tears of suffering. They had learned about a future not their own to plan.

Ray Sanders tells a story about a boy who was close to his grandmother. She collected hourglasses and he enjoyed turning them down side up so he could watch the sand run through time and again. Even after he became a teenager, he enjoyed finding new hourglasses as gifts for his grandmother. One day, his parents sat him down on the sofa for a talk. They explained how his grandmother was very sick and in the hospital and how her time was short. That evening, they took went to the hospital for a visit and he removed an envelope from his coat pocket. His grandmother opened the envelope to find it full of sand.

Beloved, let not your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Jesus. For Jesus reveals God to you as One who offers peace, not worry; and a relationship, not separation. Amen and AMEN!