



SAINT LUKE'S

ALL SAINTS SUNDAY
YEAR A

REVELATION 7:9-17
1 JOHN 3:1-3
MATTHEW 5:1-12

A SERMON BY THE REV. BO REYNOLDS

NOVEMBER 5, 2017

Today is a momentous day in Christ's church.

On this Feast of All Saints, as we recognize the lineage of hope which we share in and we consider how "great a cloud of witnesses" surrounds and uplifts us, we welcomed four new young people into our community of faith through the sacrament of baptism. One of the most meaningful pieces of the baptismal liturgy, for me, comes after a person has been baptized and sealed with chrism, when a single candle is lit from the larger Paschal Candle, the light of Christ among us, and passed to the newly baptized.

Two important things happen here, in my eyes. The first is the transmission of our shared legacy, a handing off of the baton, if you will. To be a Christian, to be part of this particular communal reflection of God's Love in the world, is never something which we do alone. We are a link in a long chain of men and women who fought for what is right, who hoped, and prayed, and wept, and rejoiced in their individual journeys with God, and we are never truly alone as we do the same in ours. The second is the power of the symbol itself: The ability of even a single candle to dispel the darkness around it.

I know for myself that reminders like these feel increasingly necessary in the times in which we live. This past week, we were reminded of the impact a single person, warped by hatred and fear, can have upon so many others around them, of how far beyond their own heart and mind their pain can radiate, harming so many others. In the

wake of such reckless violence and loss of life, it can seem paralyzing to consider how best to respond. Such evil baffles our minds.

And as I consider what the way forward looks like, what my proper response is to be, I find both hard and good news present in the gospel passage we heard today.

The hard news is that Jesus tells us that the work of the kingdom of Heaven will not be easy. So often this passage is remembered as a beautiful text idealizing charitable living, but I encourage you to re-read who Jesus is calling Blessed: The poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who are persecuted and reviled for righteousness sake. Even the descriptions which might sound more amenable to us (the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers), when considered in our modern context, can seem absurdly idealistic, impossible to live out in a practical way. Is there room for mercy in a world of terrorists who turn innocuous daily objects in to weaponry? Is there space for peacemaking under the ever-present threat of nuclear holocaust?

But there is good news, and it is twofold: Our work is not in vain, and we do not walk this path alone. Jesus promises a deeper fulfillment, one which is often paradoxical on its first hearing. Mercy and comfort, fulfillment and reward are ours, but only because we participated in the shared work of self-emptying love for the good of others, one which so often costs us dearly, because it forces us to be open and vulnerable to

the complexities and sorrows of the world around us. You see, what Jesus is calling us to in the Beatitudes is not another program of moral reform based upon the exertion of self-will or determination. Jesus is calling us to a life transformed by love, and this is very often a painful endeavor. The great multitude of the redeemed described in our reading from Revelation are identified as ‘those who have come out of the great ordeal’ and are promised that God will wipe every tear from their eyes, but this first requires us to weep and mourn. To live in the world as children of God, as members of the kingdom of heaven, to accept that baton, that spark of hope however faint in our baptism

requires us to be transformed by a Love greater than ourselves. 1 John tells us this: “See what Love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God...”.

We are a body of people of transformed by Love called to share this Love with those around us. The example of the great cloud of witnesses, the saints who have gone before, who live among us, and who have yet to come, encourages us that this work is not futile. So often the word saint is one shrouded in stained glass and mystique, one which makes us feel as if we mere mortals could never truly achieve the great heights of those who have gone before. And yet the true power of their example is not one of lofty miracles or valiant self-sacrifice, but of those who trod the path of a thousand steps of faithfulness...those who on a daily basis chose to allow their lives to be transformed by the radiance of divine love and to let that love shine through them in every action, however mundane, they took, in ways that history may never remember

nor multitudes never commemorate.

Therese of Lisieux phrases it this way: “Miss no single opportunity of making some small sacrifice, here by a smiling look, there by a kindly word; always doing the smallest right and doing it all for love.” The smallest of actions, the humblest of lives can shine the brilliant radiance of the kingdom of heaven if it allows itself to be pained by the suffering of others, if it brings mercy where others would bring recompense, if it hungers for righteousness and truth where others are satisfied with expediency and half-truth, if it is willing to endure scorn and persecution in standing for what is right.

Like those we welcomed in baptism today, we too hold in our hearts a single flame shining with the transforming Love of God, one which brings us deeper into communion with God and one another. And yet the power is not solely in the single flame, but in our collective witness. We must, on a daily basis, in the smallest, and biggest, and most average of ways, bring this light to bear where it is so desperately needed in our lives. We are not called to emulate the saints for their grand miracles, but for their daily faithfulness. And in this way

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”

Amen.

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