

LIVING LIKE A SAINT?

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Virginia Beach VA 23452
All Saints Day

As I was writing this sermon I found myself in an interesting place of reflection. As many of you know our house and our lives have been totally disrupted for the past month. On October 6 the contractors arrived and gutted our kitchen, committing us to this major project we have been wanting to do for quite awhile. That night, Wendy's father Bill suffered a fatal heart attack and passed away around 7:00 p.m. All this while we were up at Virginia Seminary celebrating our 10 year reunion with our classmates of 2004.

Wendy and I leave today right after the service to go to Cleveland for the funeral on Tuesday. However I am doing some of the work on the kitchen and there was window and door trim that had to be installed before we left or else that project would be delayed. I also had two sermons to write. The sermon for this All Saints Service and the second for my father-in-law's funeral. So I wrote this in between coats of stain and the final polyurethane on woodwork that had to be done so work can continue while we are gone. A coat of finish then a little writing followed by more finish and more writing. In all of this I found myself remembering that last year at this time I was in between the visit I had with my dad while he was still relatively healthy in September and my last visit with him which was just a few weeks before he died. As I said an interesting place to be.

All Saints is time for remembering, honoring and yes grieving for many of us, myself included. I realized in talking to Nancy that the names of both my father and my father in law will be read in just a few minutes when remember those who have died since our last All Saints service. I had to just sit with that for a few moments and was grateful for a little quiet time. With all the disruption neither Wendy and I have had time to grieve, but that's what funerals are for. That's what All Saints is for.

So what is this Communion of Saints that we mention every week in the Nicene Creed? The three day celebration of All Hallows Eve, All Saints and All Souls day causes us to take a moment and look death straight in the eye. It also allows to know that death does not have the final say. The Rev. John Wall in the *New Dictionary for Episcopalians*¹ defines the Communion of Saints as "The doctrine that a spiritual union exists between Christ and all Christians living or dead; saint here is used in its original sense as meaning any baptized Christian." The collect today says; "God has knit together in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord" all of us.

Br. David wrote yesterday: "(On All Saints) we recall that we are in the presence of all the saints, those men and women and children who have gone before us in the faith, who have shown us the way by their words and their actions. The Christian faith affirms that for these followers of Christ, "life is changed not ended" and that they continue to be present to us in the "communion of saints." Having finished the race they were given to run, they are now praying for us, supporting us, and cheering us on as we run the

race that has been set before each one of us.”

-Br. David Vryhof [Society of Saint John the Evangelist](#)

There was a mystic who once told me that there was a time when standing in a large cathedral she became aware of a light behind the priest as he was celebrating communion. As she looked at the light she realized that she was seeing people, a long line of people standing with the priest at the altar. For me that is a good start at looking at today's service. All those who have gone before gathered with us.

How do we know a saint? Jesus in today's lesson gives us a very good hint. Saints are described fairly clearly in the Beatitudes. Our Thursday lunch and bible study was watching a video and one of the people made the point that the Sermon on the Mount has only things to do not a word about what to believe. These are actions that show how people who understand the kingdom behave..

First of all it is helpful to know that blessed in Aramaic is *ashray*, which means to set yourself on the right path, the way to become righteous. Now many have difficulty with these life instructions and once again I find Peterson's Message translation helpful in discerning the right path.

Matt. 5:3 “You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

Matt. 5:4 “You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

Matt. 5:5 “You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

Matt. 5:6 “You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

Matt. 5:7 “You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'carefull,' you find yourselves cared for.

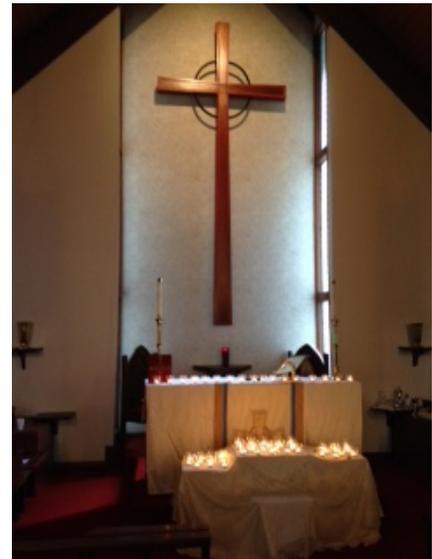
Matt. 5:8 “You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

Matt. 5:9 “You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

Matt. 5:10 “You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

Matt. 5:11 “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable.

These put us on the path to God, on the path to being a “saint.” On All Saints we are called to remember those saints in our lives. Listen as I read the following reflection on the beatitudes and think about who fits each of these. Later when we bring up our candles (*see picture*) with your offering of your pledges for next year, remember those saints, make your offering one of remembrance for all those saints who have gone before. Offer that light in honor of those you named.



- Who do you know who has turned to God when their life was falling apart around them? Who are the people who know their dependence on God alone and were an example of faith in God for you
- Who do you know who has lost something or someone close to them and kept their faith in God. Who are the people who have trusted God to provide for them in their time of sorrow and mourning
- Who do you know that was or is content with who they are. Who realizes that they are loved by God, just as they are? People who are able to reach out in love to others, knowing that they are loved by God. The person in your life who is “peace filled”.
- Who do you know who works for justice? As our Baptismal Covenant says, “will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?”
- Who do you know who attempts to see Christ in others? Who are the people who see the best in others and helps you to see the beauty in the world around you?
- Who are the people in your life who are peacemakers, who promote acts of reconciliation in the world?
- Who do you know who has striven for justice and peace among people, in Jesus Name, and experienced persecution in their daily life. Who do you know who has stood up for what they believed in and been ostracized. Or maybe even something simple such as attending worship, instead of a sports event on a Sunday morning?

We are in good company with the prophets and Christians who have gone before us. Saints are really just normal people, but people who choose a different path than many. They have their flaws, quirks and weaknesses, but they constantly sought and seek to walk the path that Christ laid out. As Christians we follow those who have come before us and lived the message of the Beatitudes. We are called to put our feet on the path that Christ offers us. AMEN.

The following is the blessing that I used at the end of the service. Thank you to my friend the Rev. Kate Kelderman for posting this:

All Saints Blessing from Bishop Steven Charleston -

Can you hear them? Can you hear them as they pass by? Can you feel them standing just beside you? They are the ones who have gone before, saints who have touched our lives. They are the family to which we belong, ancient and never ending. Our ancestors watch over us, their constant vigil keeping. Their wisdom surrounds us. Their healing a river through channels of time. Can you hear them? They speak of a love they have seen, love beyond imagining, love that holds us safe, until we rise to meet them.

ⁱ The Rev. John N. Wall, Jr. *A New Dictionary for Episcopalians* (Harper Row, San Francisco 1985) pg 51.