

All Saints' Sunday, November 6, 2016. St. Augustine's, Freeland WA Nigel Taber-Hamilton

I remember being at a preaching conference at the National Cathedral back in 1987 – October 19th. I remember the specific date not because of what I learned – which was a lot – but because that day is called “Black Monday” – the stock market lost nearly a quarter of its value in one day!

I remember that, for the conference, we had to bring a recent sermon we'd preached and share it with one another. One priest – he was the chaplain at the University of Mississippi – “Ole Miss” – brought his All Saints' Day sermon, in which he talked about a specific ancient saint of the Church – I don't remember which one. Afterward, in the Q & A, we asked why he didn't talk about everyone being a saint. He simply said “that's what I preached last year!”

That's another way of saying that today is a day with multiple associations – yes, we're remembering “All the Saints” in the traditional definition: persons of heroic sanctity, whose deeds will be recalled with gratitude by later generations. But we're also remembering what the word “saint” really means – all of us. The Reformation recovered that alternate or “as well” understanding: that we're called to remember that we are **living** saints; we're saints because we've been baptized into the Body of Christ: nothing more, nothing less.

This isn't a modern understanding: calling every baptized person a saint was given to the earliest Christians – each and every one of them – by Paul's authentic letters. In the formal introduction to his letters he often told the people he wrote to that they were “saints” – a word which means “Holy Ones.” More importantly, he called them “saints” whether he agreed with them and their behavior or not (and he certainly didn't in the case of the Corinthian community).

Today – All Saints' Sunday – we remember who we are as people of faith and are reminded of the consequences of taking on that name: reminded that we're called to be a specific kind of people.

And today – All Saints' Sunday – we remember who's gone before us: persons of heroic sanctity, whose deeds will be recalled with gratitude by later generations.

There's a third meaning, too – one that ended up being moved by a day and given a new name because the multiple meanings of All Saints' Day was just too much for one celebration. That new day was called All Souls Day. That meaning has to do with all those who have gone before us who were important to us because of the way they lived their lives as people of faith – the “Faithful Dead.”

And, related to that, All Souls Day came to be about not only the Faithful Dead, but was also a day of particular remembrance of family members and friends – it was a *Día de Muertos* (Day of the Dead) before there was a *Día de Muertos* in Hispanic tradition! That list in the bulletin comes from this last category – family and friends who have died who are still important for us.

All of these understandings share one thing in common – they're predicated on memory: memory

of past events and people – and that’s true whether they’re dead or living, whether they’re towering people of faith or ordinary believers.

Without that ability to recollect – without being People of Memory – we not only have no common identity, we have no faith. So today we remember all those who have gone before us, who have, in the words of the 2nd letter to Timothy that we heard so recently, “..... have fought the good fight....have finished the race...have kept the faith.” Saints of God who went before us, giving us – as saints of God – an example of Godly living.

I think our identity as “saints-no-matter-what” raises a different sort of question for us. Not “are you a saint?” but “what sort of a saint are you? What are your values as a saint?”

Jesus, you’ll recall, insisted that true people of faith begin with a positive vision of a world created and embraced by God. That vision is summarized in the great commandment, that we should love God and our neighbor as our self. The rest, as the great rabbi Hillel said, is just commentary!

St. Paul wasn’t afraid to engage in commentary! He had a three-fold – triune! – list: faith, hope, and love.

We’re people of faith not in the sense of a philosophical belief in something – I can say I believe that water is wet, but when it comes to faith, that sort of belief isn’t particularly helpful. Faith’s more about *trust in* than *belief about*. We trust in the God who created all, we trust in Jesus who redeemed – and continues to redeem – all (including all of us), we trust in the Spirit who sustains all (including all of us).

We’re people of hope because we have committed ourselves through baptism to God’s future, and we invest our living in helping to make that future come about.

And, as I said, we’re people of love: we’re called to predicate our lives on a loving response in all that we are and do.

And “we” is an important word. In baptism the language is always 1st person singular: “I” – but once baptized, the language changes to plural: “we.” The call of God is into community – a very specific sort of community that’s organic, that’s a living organism – the Body of Christ – **a community that functions like a body functions, with each part working with each other part – even if their roles are different – based on the vision and identity of God we see in Jesus.**

Let us pray: O God, give us the strength to be your people in this place and in this world, that we may truly live up to the name we have been given: saints of God every one of us. Amen.