

All Saints' Sunday
November 6, 2011
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All Saints' Sunday is one of the four Sundays of the year – five when a bishop visits – when we renew our baptismal vows. The others are.....anyone? Easter (in the spring), Pentecost (at the edge of summer), and the Baptism of our Lord (in early January). Afterward you should ask Bill Adams why we don't do it at Christmas – one of the three great festivals of our faith along with Easter and Pentecost! Today is a reminder day – a reminder of who we are and what that means.

It's only natural, therefore, that the service is a little different than on a regular Sunday. Let's see how. Turn to page 10 of the bulletin and, right after the sermon, you'll see the renewal of vows. It contains very direct questions in two distinct halves. The first half is asking: "Do you believe in God as Christianity has come to understand God?" We don't use the Nicene Creed – which is plural and focused on community... "we believe"...we use the Apostles Creed, which is the creed of baptism and is personal – no hiding here! It's the earliest creed – it precedes the Nicene Creed, and one important difference between the two is that the Apostles Creed says nothing about Jesus being divine – that made it more acceptable to groups that later split over the Nicene Creed – including over one-third of Christianity: that part from Jerusalem to Tokyo that we hear so little about.

Then, after the question and answer over the Apostles Creed the second half asks: "As a consequence will you act in ways that give evidence of your faith?"

- # "Will you continue living the way that the Apostles taught was the way to honor and follow Jesus, a way in which fellowship, prayer and Eucharist was – and still is – central?"
- # Will you resist those things that threaten your personal integrity and honesty, that can destroy relationships and damage the community? And if you fail – and we all do, sometimes – will you work to put yourself back on the path that leads back to God?
- # Will you live in ways that make it clear you have found something very special in Christian faith, ways that telegraph to others the life-giving, joyful message about God?
- # Will you go out of your way to be of service to everyone, and especially those in need, because they all bear the image of Christ? Everyone? Even the people you don't like?
- # Will you place these two core values – **justice and peace** – at the center of your life? Will you **honor and respect** the humanity of every human being? Everyone? Remember what Jesus said about loving your friends? Anyone can do that. What about loving your enemies?

We hear a lot about the word "**lifestyle**" today, and not always in the most favorable of lights. But it's a good word for what the baptismal covenant proclaims – not the only word, but a good word. This sort of Christian faith is a way of living, and a way that can be counter to the prevailing values of our world. In fact early devotees of Jesus weren't called Christians at all –

that was actually an insult; they were called “followers of the Way” – that’s an active description: The Way, the Pilgrimage, the Journey, and it’s an invitation to us to see our faith as active, as intentional, and as directed.

So that’s the first half of what I want to say today – that we have just re-dedicated ourselves to a life lived in a particular way; one where the God we meet in Jesus is central.

Now I want to tell you about something I found helpful that we did at Diocesan Convention that helps flesh out what I’ve just said; that adds some very specific statements about what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

I said “we”. The “we” was myself, Bill Adams, Fletcher Davis, Amy Donohue-Adams, Albert Rose, Margaret Schultz, Bert and Mary Ann Speir. For about 10 minutes at the beginning of Convention we were asked to talk about some questions and provide feedback. The one we chose is worthy of a report to you – what key ideas are central for you when it comes to Christian faith? We chose not to say “the creed says it all”, or “the baptismal covenant says it all” – though we could have done that (and gone to the bar for a drink?). What we did instead was brain-storm four key statements – here they are:

1. **The proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord by both word and deed is central to our faith.** The vision that Jesus proclaimed, the life he lived, the servanthood he modeled, the surrender to God he epitomized – that vision, that life, that servanthood, that surrender, are what we have committed to proclaim “by word and example” – or perhaps, by example and word, since what we do is so much more powerful than what we say, as Jesus himself reminded us last week.
2. **The proposition that “Christian faith is transformative” is central to our faith.** If we live with integrity and authenticity the life of the Way, if we make the pilgrims’ journey, we cannot help but find that our lives are transformed.
3. **The experience of fellowship and community as essential and empowering is central to our faith.** It’s a truism that you can’t be a Christian in isolation. It’s in sharing with others a common vision and working to bring that vision into reality that we really live into our faith.
4. **Baptism and Eucharist are central to our faith.** In baptism we receive the gift of belonging – belonging to God, belonging to each other – and in Eucharist, in sharing bread and wine as Jesus told us to, we make tangible and real that belonging.

All Saints’ Day is about these things – a day to celebrate all saints’ – which means us: the word “saint” – “hagios” in Greek – means “holy one” and it’s what St. Paul called all the believers in all the communities he founded and wrote to – all of them. So it refers to us too, as well as those other, special folk we traditionally think of when we use that word.

All Saints’ Day is about us beings saints – and that involves the creedal statement directly related to our baptisms that we will, momentarily “re-up” to; it’s about promising to live in a certain way that involves modeling our lives after the founder of our faith, Jesus, and his disciples; its about living with those central statements I just outlined, about proclamation, about transformative living, about community, and about common worship.

This is who we are. This is why we do what we do. This is what we commit to.