

November 1, 2015



“What Does Love Look Like? All Saints”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

John 15:9-13

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Many, many generations ago, the Psalmist wrote: “O Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.”

The beautiful remembrance of All Saints is not a church tradition I grew up with. My United Methodist congregation's worship was fairly plain and straightforward without a lot of ritual or embellishment. But over the last 30 years or so, the church has experienced what is called an ecumenical convergence, that is, growing understanding among Protestant and Catholic church and sharing of traditions and liturgies. For us Methodists, that has enable a reclaiming of ancient traditions and practices—Ash Wednesday, the labyrinth, reaffirmation of baptism, and the remembrance of All Saints.

I am so grateful, because for me, and for many of you, this day has taken on deep meaning and significance, as we remember and give thanks to God for all the saints who now, from their labors rest, yet remain in our hearts and in the heart of God forever. It is a day when, in remembering, we find comfort, assurance, and hope. In fact, John Wesley wrote in his journal on this day in 1788, “I always find this a comfortable day.”

O Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

This day of remembrance goes all the way back to the early 7th century and Pope Boniface IV. As the nights grow longer, we gather to give praise to God, to name the names of this fellowship who have died in this year just past, and to name in our hearts all those whom we love but see no more. The name is read. A bell is rung as a prayer, as a sign of our grief and their entrance into heaven. A candle is lit to signify the light of Christ which they received in their baptism will burn brightly forever in the dwelling place of God.

This is all in affirmation of the core of what we believe and know to be true. God is our dwelling place in all generations. This assurance is a balm to our grieving hearts. And this affirmation, I believe, is a gift to all people living as we do in a culture that relentlessly emphasizes “me” and “now,” leaving us often feeling frightened, empty, and alone.

Christian faith puts our lives and all life in a much larger and longer frame. We bring to our hearts today all those who have gone before, all who have gone on ahead of us. In the love of God, they are always as close as a thought and a prayer. Thanks be to God! The God who creates and cherishes all time and all generations is our refuge and our strength. God abides in the river of time. And in the river of time, nothing goes missing. In the love of God, everything is caught up and preserved, held forever in the enduring memory and purpose of God.

That love, in the beginning, in the creation, embracing each successive generation—the children, the grandchildren, the great-grand-children, the great-greats, the great-great-greats now too numerous to count—embracing the past, the present and the future in one unbroken flow.

What does love look like? It looks like all who have gone before, all here present this day, and all who are yet to be born. It's as if we took all the photo directories of all the churches in all of time, and this new one we are creating here, and all our own family photo albums, and all those blank pages waiting to be filled...this is what love looks like.

The living God is indeed eternal. This love connects us to the past, and grounds us in the present, and—links us to a future yet unfolding. For the saints of God are past, present and future. And so this day, this All Saints remembrance, also asks how we should live as God's saints *now* and how we intend to pass on the faith to future generations. For today we not only grieve, we celebrate all that is to come, also held in the great sweeping embrace of God's eternal love, the onward flowing river of love.

How are we to live as saints now? In ways that are faithful and authentic. In ways that are humble and serving others. In ways that are vulnerable and loving and brave, that in us, through us, all may see what love looks like. “You must go on living in my love,” Jesus tells us. “You must go on living in my love.”

May God fill us with hope, with grace, with assurance, with passion—to go on living in love.

For all the saints—thanks be to God.

Notes:

Jurgen Moltmann. The Living God and the Fullness of Time. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015.

Shane Raynor. “Redeeming Halloween by Rediscovering Allhallowtide.” *Ministry Matters*. Oct. 2, 2015.

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