



“Our School of Love”

Homily by Rev. Patricia Farris

Ephesians 3:18-19

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

This morning we begin our annual reflection on our support of our congregation through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, our witness, with a special focus on our financial support. You'll see the logo of this year's campaign on the front of your Order of Worship. “School of Love” is our theme.

Church is a School of Love. It is a place and a people that teach us how to live a life of love. We learn the ways of Christ's love in prayer, Scripture, and worship. We learn the ways of love in the smiles of children and the questions of youth. We learn the ways of love in shared tears and laughter. We learn love sharing meals and mission projects with one another. The church is a School of Love.

Love teaches us patience and endurance. It teaches us selflessness and living for others. Love teaches us joy and gratitude. Love invites us to give generously and joyfully. It teaches us to strive to make our giving reflect our deepest priorities. Love teaches us to live and give after the example of Christ Jesus.

Many of us grew up in Christian households and Christian families. We can think of our own parents and grandparents as teachers who taught us what it means to live as a disciple of Jesus, who gave us clues about faith and how it's the glue that holds us together, how it's the source of strength in the present, how faith opens the door to a future bright with hope.

Not all of us grew up in the church. Some came along with friends. Some of us, it's so amazing to me, just sort of wandered in on your own, and found something that had been missing in your heart, and sat down and decided to stay awhile.

No matter how you got here, the saints were here first. In fact, you are sitting in their pew spot this morning. They were here first, and they'll be here long after. In them, we find intergenerational strength and power. “There is no living without the dead, and no death without the living.”

This morning, we pray that God's spirit of wisdom and revelation might open our eyes and the eyes of our hearts to see the glorious cloud of witnesses on this All Saints Sunday, those who have gone on ahead, those who sat in these pews before we were even born, those who dreamed a church and lived lives of steady faithfulness, those who walked the path before us, those who paved the way, those who taught us by their example, and in whose debt we now live. Here we now sit, surrounded by countless generations, the living and the dead bound together in faith and love.

I want us to see this morning the riches of God's glorious inheritance among the saints. Because, though they have now gone home to be with God, they are never far from us, as close to our hearts as a breath and prayer. They are our teachers in this School of Love we call church. They cheer us on, they comfort us, they reassure us. And we are rich in the inheritance of

their faith and their love. They persevered in hope through the darkest times and they gave thanks to God in times of plenty, times of joy. They persisted in faith, these teachers, through times of doubt. They persisted through suffering and anxiety. No matter what, through the high times and the low times, the good times and the bad times, they kept faith at the center of their lives and this is the greatest lesson we can learn from them, our beloved teachers.

Today we remember this special community that shapes us and nurtures and holds us accountable, this School of Love in which we live, extending to all God's people on earth and all the company of heaven.

Love shines strong through the people of God and through the ministries and mission of Santa Monica First UMC. In this season of Thanksgiving, as we member our saints, our teachers, and renew our pledge of our financial resources to the glory of God, we rejoice in this School of Love and are grateful for this place and people that grow us into the disciples Christ calls us to become.

In a moment, I will read aloud the names of members of our congregation who have gone home to be with God this year. Then there will be a time for all of us to lift up additional names of those near and dear to us.

May this commemoration, and the sacrament of Holy Communion which follows, unite us with these dear teachers in our School of Love and with Christ, praying that God may grant that we may be strengthened in our inner being with power through the Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love, and that we may have the power to comprehend, to know, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Alleluia! Amen.

Notes:

Brian McLaren writes of church as a school of love in several of his books.

Daniel Hernandez. "On the Day of the Dead, life and death can blur." November 1, 2019: *The Los Angeles Times*.