

All Saints Sunday, Year C
3 November 2019
Trinity Episcopal Church, Bend
The Rev. Anne K. Bartlett

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1:11-23
Luke 6:20-31

In the name of God who has called us each by name. Amen.

What a privilege to be with you this morning! And *what* a morning! All Saints Sunday is the church's family reunion across time and space, a thin place in our liturgical year when the great cloud of witnesses gone to glory is almost palpably present.

Everyone's here today. Saints from the pages of Holy Scripture, saints from our tradition, whom we all share, saints known to us alone, and saints of this parish, the ones whom you still tell stories about ~ the curmudgeons and the peculiar ones and those whose steadfastness or sweetness was beyond compare ~ their presence can still be felt, hovering up in the rafters, cheering you on.

We all get to come. As soon as we rose dripping from the holy water of our baptisms, we were made kin to one another. Christ's blood runs in all our veins.

Which means we, too, though still on this side of the Great Divide, we too are in the communion of saints for we have been sealed by the Spirit and marked as Christ's own, forever. That's what "saint" means. When St. Paul wrote to those struggling young Christian congregations, he called them "the church," "sanctified in Christ Jesus," "called to be saints." Hello, you saints. Hello, church.

So the question isn't *who* is saint – we *all* are, by virtue of our baptisms. The question becomes what *kind* of saints are we? For there are good saints and bad saints, faithful saints and not-so-faithful saints, irritating saints and beloved saints, crackpot saints and brilliant saints, baby saints and mature saints. We are not all angels, but still by God's grace, we *are* all saints, called to never stop growing into faithful Christian discipleship as long as we have breath on this earth...or until the Kingdom comes, whichever happens first.

But here at Trinity, Bend today, it's not only All Saints Sunday but also Consecration Sunday when you will complete your annual estimate of giving cards and bring them at communion as your offering to God. And then we'll feast, first at Christ's table and then in the Parish Hall.

Before I go any farther, I want to come clean about how I feel preaching about financial giving. I wish I felt more comfortable with the topic. After all, our Lord mentioned money and possessions more than any thing else besides the Kingdom of Heaven – because our money and our stuff can be such stumbling blocks for us to the abundant new life God desires for us to have right now.

The reason I am conflicted about money talk in a Christian context is because of Mrs. McGillicutty. (And I do apologize if anyone here shares that name or cares about someone with that name.) Mrs. McGillicutty is what I call the part of me who is uber-practical, who values facts far more than feelings, the one who makes daily,

prioritized To Do lists and gets such satisfaction checking off the items. My Mrs. McGillicutty is fairly skilled at administration, she can hold the entire calendar of a vibrant parish in her head, and she stays on top of budgetary details. I admit she can be somewhat of a steamroller, but man! does she gets things done.

However, my Mrs. McGillicutty is never, ever allowed into the sacred space of worship. If ~~the part of me that is Mrs. McGillicutty~~ ^{she} were allowed into the pulpit this morning, she would have wanted your parish budget printed out and put as an insert in your bulletins. That's how a well-run business would do it, right? Follow the money. Make the case for monetary increases. Pledge to the practicalities. Give to the asked-for budget. That's the best-business practice for successful fund-raising, is it not?

Well, that may be the way of the world, but as with so many things in our life in Christ, it runs cross-wise to the way of God's Kingdom. Every time the Mrs. McGillicutty parts of ourselves are in control, we run the danger of forgetting just how *counter-cultural* our faith calls us to be. Radically, outrageously, paradoxically counter-cultural. And that includes how we think and talk about money.

Which brings us to the gospel for this All Saints Sunday, the Beatitudes. Unlike Matthew's version, called The Sermon on the Mount, Luke puts Jesus on the plain, on level ground, in the midst of all who came to hear him that day in hopes for healing, in hopes for finding meaning in a toxic culture, in hopes, perhaps, for

hope itself. When Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor,” he didn’t add “in spirit,” as Matthew did in his version. He meant those in literal poverty, the ones with no resources. “Blessed are the hungry” are the ones whose stomachs were empty.

There is no spiritual softening the way Luke told this story.

And ^{Luke}only includes the “woes.” Now is made manifest the gospel theme of the Great Reversal in which the first shall be last. We who have plenty now will have nothing, we will be the ones who are hungry, weeping, our precious reputations shredded. At the time of the Great Reversal, we won’t have the luxury of debating with ourselves how much giving is good enough because we won’t have anything to give.

Yikes. These are hard words. Applicable perhaps if you’re a saint...but, we protest, we are no saints. Except...except we are, by virtue of our baptisms.

So as I have been sitting a while with this gospel and thinking about all the dynamics of this special Sunday, an old story keeps coming to mind, one I’m sure many of you have heard before, but I’ll risk telling it again:

Once, a long time ago, there was a wise Zen master. People from far and near would seek his counsel and ask for his wisdom. Many would come and ask him to teach them, enlighten them in the way of Zen. He seldom turned any away.

One day an important man, a man used to command and obedience came to visit the master. “I have come today to ask you to teach me about Zen. Open my mind to enlightenment.” The tone of the important man’s voice was one used to getting his own way.

The Zen master smiled and said that they should discuss the matter over a cup of tea. When the tea was served the master poured his visitor a cup. He poured and he poured and the tea rose to the rim and began to spill over the table and finally onto the robes of the wealthy man. Finally the visitor shouted, "Enough. You are spilling the tea all over. Can't you see the cup is full?"

The master stopped pouring and smiled at his guest. "You are like this tea cup, so full that nothing more can be added. Come back to me when the cup is empty. Come back to me with an empty mind."

Woe to us who are so full that nothing more can be added. We are blessed when we are vulnerable (there's that countercultural thing again) because it is then when we admit we are at the end of our own resources, when we are finally empty enough to be hungry for God's grace, when our hearts break open in grief, it is then when the Spirit can touch us and transform us, little by little, into Christ.

That's, I believe, the divine logic behind all those woe's. And that's why Jesus talked so much about money and possessions because he worried not about the bottom line but because he loved us who have so much and he worried about our ability to recognize the Kingdom of God even when it is right in front us, ours for the entering. When we rely upon our own resources, we depend on our own safety nets, and we can hedge our bets when it comes to a more complete and joyous surrender in trust to our God who is as near to us as our own breath, who has called us by name and claimed us, who is holding us in Love, irrespective of our circumstances.

Poverty, grief, hunger, humiliations – such hard ways to be cracked open to God. Those are not the only ways, of course. And yet...and yet has it not been true at some point in our own life experiences? The hard times often are when we are most open to God.

Our superstar saints knew all about the upside of vulnerability, of course: blessed St. Francis reveled in the embrace of Lady Poverty; blessed St. Catherine of Siena got into such trouble because she gave away to the poor not only all of her own belongings but as much as she could of her family's as well; blessed St. Patrick as a youth found God when he was taken into slavery; and on and on it goes, saints emptied of themselves so that the Holy One could fill them to overflowing with life abundant and eternal.

Blessed old St. Iraneaus said "The glory of God is a human person fully alive." We can't be fully alive when we're too defended. We can't be fully alive when we try to numb the inevitable griefs and yearnings and hungers of our souls, not realizing we are at the same time also smothering joy and intimacy and love. To give God glory by being fully alive requires us to be vulnerable...and that's about as countercultural a statement as we'll ever hear these days.

Dearly beloved, the bottom line isn't about money. It's about our spiritual growth in Christ, our increasing trust in the One who has given us life so that we may be more fully alive.

So when you fill out your giving cards, my prayer for you is that you will sit with the wondrous knowledge that you are God's beloved, you have been called by name, and the Kingdom of Heaven is all around, waiting for you this day and ever more.

Amen.