

St. Columba's Episcopal Church
November 6, 2022 – All Saints' Sunday
Luke 6:20-31
The Rev. Dr. Susan Kraus

“Is there anybody here who loves my Jesus? Anybody here who loves the Lord? I want to know, do you love my Jesus? I want to know, do you love the Lord?” These words are the refrain of an African American song of witness to the love of Christ.

Today we celebrate All Saints' Sunday, a day that's all about love. God's love. The love of Jesus poured out for God's people. Our love for God. Our love for Jesus. Saints are people whose lives show how the love of God has transformed their hearts. Saints are people who love God deeply and witness to their love of God and God's way of love in their lives, sometimes even by giving up their lives. Some saints are well known. Most saints are unknown to any but God and the small circle of people whose lives they inspire and bless. What is the church but people who love Jesus, people who love the Lord? People who want to love God more deeply and witness to that love more faithfully. People who want to be saints, as we will sing today in our hymn “I sing a song of the saints of God.”

One way to think of Christian saints is as people who seek to follow the teaching and example of Jesus whole heartedly and authentically. For some people this has meant following one particular teaching of Jesus. St. Francis and others heard Jesus' call to a life of voluntary poverty in his words to the rich young man: “Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor... then come, follow me” (Mark 10:21). For some people this has meant imitating a particular aspect of Jesus' life. St. Ignatius of Antioch and others gave up their lives as martyrs in witness to their faith in Christ, who gave his life on the cross.

More ordinary people – people like us – are inspired by many of Jesus' teachings. And we see in the life of Jesus much to imitate – his life of prayer, his compassionate interaction with people who were suffering, his confrontation of those who misused God's commandments. The life and teaching of Jesus may lead us to work diligently for a particular cause – justice, peace, healing, creation care, a ministry to prisoners, support for the poor and hungry. Or perhaps, as ordinary Christian people, we feel called to obey the teaching and example of Jesus in a broad fashion – wherever, whenever, and however his teaching and example intersect with the circumstances and events of our lives. We live ordinary lives interacting with family and friends and the many people we encounter in daily life. We work and we enjoy leisure time. We are engaged in community and church activities. We spend time with others and time alone. Hopefully all touched and changed by the Lord of love.

I believe that anyone who sincerely tries to live in accordance with the life and teaching of Jesus knows how challenging that can be and how often we fail. Being a “saint” doesn’t mean being perfect. No one “gets it right” like that.

This prayer of the famous Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, expresses well what many ordinary Christian people feel: “My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road” (In “Thoughts in Solitude”).

Our times are dark, and the world is full of hatred and violence and lies, greed and misuse of power. The church can be a beacon of light in dark times. We don’t hide from the reality of the forces of darkness. After all, what could be darker than the cross of Christ? We bear witness to the reality of the darkness. But we uphold the light of Christ, for what light could be brighter than the light of his resurrection?

It is important that we are here to proclaim the message that the light of Christ is never overcome by darkness, never. It is important that we gather together to remember that there is another way to live, not the way of the world but the way of love. It is important that we celebrate the saints, people whose lives have shown the love of God which is in their hearts – to celebrate them and to be inspired by them.

This church is like our base camp where we are strengthened and renewed to go into the world to live in love and light, to stand up for God’s kingdom, to be faithful witnesses of Christ. The darker the times and the harder it is to live with love for our neighbors, the more we need to be a strong witness to God’s way of love.

Jesus said to his followers, “You are the light of the world.” We are all called to be saints, people who allow the love of God to shine through us as unhindered and as clearly as we can – wherever, whenever, and however we can, today and every day.

“Is there anybody here who loves my Jesus? Anybody here who loves the Lord?” Yes, indeed! Yes, indeed! Amen.