

FOR ALL THE SAINTS

Hebrews 12:1-2

Preached by Dr. Cahill

Babcock Presbyterian Church

Sunday, November 1, 2015

A pastor was giving a tour of the church's sanctuary giving special attention to the beautiful stained glass windows. The pastor said, "These four windows have images of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John, the four saints who wrote the four gospels. See how beautiful they look, especially when the sun shines through them."

A little girl raised her hand, "What is a saint?"

"A saint," the pastor answered, "is someone God's light shines through. Just as the sunlight shines through those windows, God's light shines through his saints. It's not our light that shines, it's God's light that shines through us."

The Bible teaches that the communion or community of saints is God's beloved children here on earth and God's beloved children in heaven. The Bible also teaches all the saints who ever lived and are living are watching over us.

In the Book of Hebrews the saints in heaven are identified as "that great cloud of witnesses." The unknown writer of Hebrews goes on to say therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud, let us set aside every weight and sin and run the race with perseverance...looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith."

Do you remember when Cal Ripken broke Lou Gehrig's record for the number of consecutive games played some years back? That same night he hit a home run and ran a victory lap around the bases. The crowd in Memorial Stadium went wild while thousands of flash bulbs went off. Everyone was absolutely delirious with joy over Ripken's love for the game.

Hold that image in your mind and then see yourself being cheered on by all the saints living and dead who are now rooting for you when you run your race with perseverance. Then fast forward: imagine yourself when you are in the stands cheering on the saints you left behind after you stepped into eternity.

Don't you see? God's saints are meant to pull for each other. Through Christ we are mysteriously and wonderfully related to each living and working member of the community of saints.

Today we celebrate All Saints Day. We are also celebrating Holy Communion and today we are beginning our fall stewardship campaign. (Two out of three not bad.)

Unless you just fell off the turnip wagon, you've heard about and are hopefully participating in New Beginnings, that slow and deliberate regime of prayer, meditation and scripture to fortify and prepare us for whatever new beginning God had already preordained for all the saints of Babcock Presbyterian Church.

As members of the Communion of Saints we should want our congregation to thrive, not just in numbers but especially in spiritual maturity. This is a proven fact: without enough of us first laying the foundation of spiritual formation of our characters, how can we together ever expect to be a thriving, Spirit-led congregation? For that matter, how can anything thrive and be life-changing if it's not intentionally connected to the source of its power and change? Think of your television sets or your air conditioners or microwaves. If you don't pay your electric bill or you simply pull out the plug, these modern conveniences are worthless things that take up space. That was Jesus' message when he said, "I am the vine, you are the branches, cut off from me you are nothing." It may sound harsh, but it's true. No one ever achieves his or her highest potential without first being plugged into God.

No one can ever "lay aside every weight and sin and run the race with perseverance" without first looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. You may know but you'll never experience to its fullest extent your God-given purpose unless you first practice being in the presence of God, through prayer and Christian community.

What does it mean to be in Christian community or better still being a member of the Communion of Saints? It means learning to bear one another's burdens, forgive one another, setting aside our petty differences, overcoming our need to judge each other and being willing to be servants to one another for the greater good.

Do you remember the story in the Gospels when the disciples tried to exorcise a demon from a boy but couldn't? The boy's father was irate and complained to Jesus basically saying, "They (your disciples!) promised me everything but gave me nothing."

Jesus looked at the twelve and said, "How much longer must I endure this faithless generation?" and then proceeded to heal the boy and give him back to his father.

Later that day when they were finally alone, the disciples asked Jesus why they couldn't heal the boy of his demon. They knew what to do and what to say but nothing happened. Why, Jesus?

Jesus answer. He said, "This kind of thing can only happen through prayer."

Jesus didn't mean saying sporadic prayers when you're in church or in a fix. He did mean praying without ceasing, always being aware of God's light shining through you, claiming the power of God already living within you, and being so firmly plugged into God that you're ready to do whatever God is calling you to do.

That's why the members of the church in Jerusalem wasted what some would consider an inordinate amount of time praying alone and praying with each other. You can be sure they all had the urge to go out and do something to spread the gospel, form a committee, formulate a plan and just do it. But they were wise enough to heed the apostles' instructions: Right now the most important thing you can do is pray.

Pray for your inner transformation, pray for the desire to change.

Pray for the spirit of radical obedience, that you would stop eating junk food of our own making and instead obey your hunger for the bread of heaven: righteousness, being right with God.

Pray for patience, so you resist the temptation to get off your knees and stand on your own hind legs because your legs are too wobbly, they need to be strengthened before you start your journey with Christ into the unknown.

Pray for endurance, because waiting for God sometimes means waiting for a long time, not because God is late, but because we are late, too preoccupied with what should be instead of being content with what is. We have our own idea of what we want to do that's why we don't wait and listen for what God wants us to do.

Pray for each other, not only for our security and happiness, pray for each other's courage, strength and wisdom, so when we do discern God's will we will be empowered and ready to go way past our comfort zones, take the necessary risks and sacrifices of our time, talent and treasure.

By the way, speaking of treasure, since this is the new beginning of our stewardship campaign, God, not me, God is asking you this question, a question only you can answer: Are you giving off the top or are you giving sacrificially from the bottom, not to keep Babcock solvent, get that out of your mind, but are you giving your all to Christ, who gave his all for you and me?

Of course giving isn't limited to money. Giving your time and talents over to the work of Christ's Kingdom is just as important.

This is absolutely true, when you give to holy cause, a cause greater than yourself, it comes back and blesses you tenfold.

A woman named Patricia West donated her blood to a local blood bank. After testing her blood a physician phoned Patricia and told her she had a very rare blood type, found in only one in five thousand persons. The doctor asked her to give as regularly as possible, because "Patricia, somebody's life will depend on it."

Later Patricia moved from Florida to Michigan. Months after that she underwent emergency surgery. Since her blood type was so rare the hospital contacted the National Rare Donor Registry. Blood of her type was located in Florida. They packed it in ice and flew it to Michigan. It turned out it was blood Patricia donated just before she moved. Patricia West lives today because several months earlier she was willing to give her own blood.

In just a few minutes together we will celebrate the mystery of Christ's passion. Jesus willingly submitted to his father's will and sacrificed his body and blood for us. He didn't have to do this. He could have walked away and disappeared into the wilderness. And who could blame him? Why should he die for people who were out to get him? Why should he die for his betrayer and deniers? Would you? You would if you allowed Christ to let his light shine in and through you. You would if you decided to do something, the one essential thing that guarantees you living out your purpose according to God's plan for your life: prayer.

If Jesus didn't pray without ceasing, especially in the Garden of Gethsemane, we wouldn't be here in this sanctuary. Prayer is doing. So you want to do something? Then pray. Make time to pray by yourself, make time to pray with the saints tonight. Make time for God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost and you will be delighted to discover you've been making time for yourself as a child of God, a brother or sister of Christ and a friend of the Holy Spirit.

Sainthood isn't an achievement, it's a gift for those who yearn for God's justice and peace. Are you ready to pray for it? Let us pray!