

Using Imagery

Matthew 5:1-12 All Saints Sunday

Slide: Meeting with God

If you have ever read the book, *“Chicken Soup for the Soul”*, you may have heard this brief story which I have on rare occasions used at a funeral...

“There was once a boy who wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so he packed his suitcase with Twinkies and a six-pack of root beer and he started on his journey. When he had gone about three blocks, he met an old woman. She was sitting in the park just staring at some geese.

The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. He was about to take a drink from his root beer when he noticed that the woman looked hungry, so he offered her a Twinkie. She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him. Her smile was so pretty that the boy offered her a root beer, too. She smiled again. The boy was delighted.

They sat there all afternoon eating and smiling, but they never said a word. As it grew dark, the boy realized how tired he was and he got up to leave. But before he had gone more than a few steps, he turned around, ran back to the woman and gave her a hug. She gave him her biggest smile ever.

When the boy opened the door to his own house a short time later, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, “What did you do today that made you so happy?” He replied, “I had lunch with God.” But, before his mother could respond, he added, “You know what? She’s got the most beautiful smile I’ve ever seen!”

Meanwhile, the woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and asked, “Mother, what did you do today that made you so happy?” She replied, “I ate Twinkies in the park with God.” But before her son

responded, she added, “You know, he’s much younger than I expected.”

Slide: God’s Image Bearers

This cute story points out an intrinsic fact we lovers of Jesus believe – we meet God in the faces of each other, for we are all made in the image of God. We know this from scripture that we are all created in the image of God. Furthermore, at the font, we are marked with Christ, imprinting upon us that further belonging. Therefore, if you want to see God present in this world, you simply need look around and pay attention. God works in all of the children God calls, loves, and redeems.

In what ways can we be seen in God’s image? We only look at the reading from the Gospel:

Slide: Blessed Are...

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn... who are meek... for those who hunger for

righteousness, who are merciful, who are peacemakers...”

Slide: Blessed

We encounter the image of God each and every time we come face to face with people those who are blessed and those who need blessing. Like the woman who sits with a stranger for hours sharing a Twinkie with him, we look to God’s face in others around us. That is where we truly see what the blessed ones, the ones we know now, the ones who encourage our faith, and the ones who have gone before us as the very image of God.

Slide: You were made to...

And yourself? Do you know you are God’s image walking around in this world? Perhaps you do not see yourself using such imagery, using the imagery of the very one who walked with us and among us, Jesus Christ? If you did, what would change for you? What would change in how you see others, even

people you dislike or have difficulty getting along with?

Do you think that being in God's image doesn't make a difference? If so, let me give another example:

Slide: Theresa Johnson

This is Theresa. It's likely you don't know her. Theresa is often on my mind, but I'm certain she never would have known it. She may have even been surprised by it. Theresa is a saint, that is, a child of God, who is now with Christ as are all the saints are who have gone before us in death.

You might not know it, but Theresa was a member of this this faith community of St. John's. She was literally a member for all of maybe nine months in total. Theresa joined our congregation as someone who was homebound. She had RA, Lupus, Fibromyalgia, heart disease, and diabetes. Theresa lived each day with debilitating pain and along the way, she came to also know the difficulty of a husband

leaving her, of her body becoming slowly disabled, unable to choose her future, and for her friends and colleagues to slowly move on to other active roles in life. There were few at her funeral, but all those who were there knew something special about her: She was the bright light of Jesus Christ to all who knew her. You see, one day, out of the blue, Theresa called me:

"I have heard that your congregation has compassion for those who are homebound. Is there any way I can join your congregation and have a few visits from people."

"Of course," I said. "We welcome you at St. John's."

"I don't have much," she said, "but I want to add to the life of the congregation. Perhaps I could knit prayer shawls or donate some yarn. I still can do that."

Along the way, Theresa would have warm conversations with Patti in the church office, would have coffee ready when friends

from the Senior & Shut-in ministry visited, and whenever I came to give her communion, she was the one shining God's image to me. I saw regularly how she bore with her pain with more cheerfulness and hope for Christ than I could ever hope to do for myself. Theresa taught me a great deal about how to live in the present, to see her blessings despite how hard that was. She encouraged, even though she was the one for whom we would think needed encouragement.

Theresa was a saint in faith for me. I knew her all of nine months. But, that doesn't matter. She is still in my thoughts regularly today as an encouragement - that people can live with their difficulties with purpose and kindness to themselves and others. She was blessed in the way Jesus speaks of in our Gospel. No doubt, she never could have guessed that in her very small way she could have such a large impact in a pastor's life in such a short time.

Are *you* aware of having that same impact as the God's image bearer for others? You never know how you may positively impact those around you.

Slide: All Saints Day

Today is All Saints Sunday, a time when we remember those who have died in the Lord, a time to remind ourselves that we, too, are living the lives of saints, using the imagery of the God of all things within us. And, we have so many before us for which to give thanks, especially as they were the image of God for us, for our faith, and for our journey...so that we may be the image of God for others around us.

Slide: First Communion

Seven young 3rd graders today are coming for the first time to Christ's table, to partake of their First Communion. They are saints, too, living saints new in faith. We ought to encourage them to be the blessed ones, the ones who carry the image of God in the world, and to

always encourage them to be that image for the sake of God's others.

Slide: We are Image Bearers

And, for the rest of us...think of those who have had an impact upon your faith, those who have died, and those who are living, and give thanks to God for them. But, also today, think of how you are the image of God to others and for their faith, so that faith in Christ may continue and God's Kingdom continued on earth, until by God's call, we join with all the saints in glory at the heavenly feast.

To God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be all glory, now and forever. Amen.