

Saint-ing
All Saints – Year C
Ephesians 1:11-23

I'd like to share a few vignettes from my funeral sermons from this last year:

Early on in her life, but also to the end, Liz Narveson, who was 99 years young, was quite the adventurer. Loving the natural world has to be something you live and breathe if you grow up in Duluth and when you are quite literally born right there on a fjord.

Illa Mae was blessed. She was blessed to have two amazing sisters she remained close to her for most of her life – Ramona and Lucille. She was blessed to welcome three amazing children into her life. She was blessed to make the holidays special with her baking and cooking so that even now, those meals have tender meaning, feasts of love.

When I think of Beverly today, I think of her life like it is one of her beautiful cross stitch patterns, intricate and precise. Adding to this tapestry of life, her vocation

as dental assistant and technician, her service to church here at St. John's for 60 plus years, the wonderful baking, cooking, crafting and keeping squirrels satisfied with feeding – this cross stitch is immense, with purpose and meaning and it continues on with you now today.

If Hudda were here this afternoon in the way he used to be, he would not be sitting down here. He would be up in the balcony in that same special spot where even the family still sat on Christmas Eve this year. I'm pretty sure that from this pulpit, I could see the twinkle and wit in his eye that he so had at all times. Ready for a little sideways joke, "yeah, see ya later!" and so he would make his way to the next thing in life with June at his side.

There are many more stories, too many to recall here today in this time. And, there are many more from you as you remember in blessed memory all your loved ones who have passed. Today is All Saints Sunday, a day when we remember the people in our lives who have

shown us God. On all Saints day we remember examples or models for life that those who have gone before us provided. The All Saints Feast looks back with a thankful heart to the people whose lives pointed to God. However, All Saints Sunday also looks forward to the lives we can influence with the faith we have received.

There are many people I remember on All Saints Day. Many of them have died, but many of them are still alive and are merely a phone call away. Saints are both living and dead. And, many of the saints who point to God for me in my life are seated here right now, people of faith in this family of faith. Even in confirmation this week, the children put together their faith family tree where they put down the many people around them who encouraged their faith.

What is a saint anyway? Well, in the New Testament, "saint" is a word applied to all believers, including anybody who has been baptized. Together as baptized people we comprise the "communion of saints." In the bible

reading from Ephesians you just heard begins his letter this way:

"I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers."

The saints, as the writer of Ephesians says, are all those believers in Ephesus.

In the centuries after the New Testament was written, compiled and canonized, the word "saint" came to be identified with those people in the church universal who were recognized as special, almost perfect examples of the faith.

These people were those who ended up giving up their life for the sake of Christ. An example of a saint then was someone like the woman named Perpetua, who at the beginning of the third century, was killed in the Roman arena by wild beasts just because she confessed Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ.

Yet, in the Lutheran tradition, we speak of saints in both ways. Saints are baptized people who do not trust in their own worthiness but trust in the forgiving work of Jesus to make them faithful. But also, saints are witnesses to this faith, who through their example, help us to see God more clearly.

In fact, if you look in the early Lutheran writings called the Augsburg Confession, Article 21, you would see that saints are to be remembered so that our faith may be strengthened when we see the grace they all received and shared. This is why we remember them on this day.

Therefore, this is definitely a day to remember all the saints. On this day, I remember my Dad, who was such a hero in my life, I remember my aunt Margaret who was my godmother and my grandparents. I remember two seminary professors, Dr. Timothy Lull and Dr. Robert Smith, who made both the study of Luther and Greek understandable. I remember Jim's grandparents.

But, I also remember many of the saints we have in common, those names that have been read here this morning and the lovely gift of who Kathy Kurshinsky was in person and in music, such a gift to our staff for many years. Many of those remembered today have shown God to us and that is the true definition of saint...a person who shows us God.

All of you know such people who lived and are living; some of you remember them with sorrow, with joy, or you will actually Facetime or pick up the phone to talk to them today or sometime this week. They are the saints who live now and who have gone before us, showing us God with the model of their faith.

And, this morning, I stand up here looking at you...the saints, as the choir sang this morning and as our bell choir rang bells: "I'm going on a journey and I want to be Saint, too." We are all saints, those of us who share faith in Jesus and point to that faith for others. And, this morning, I know that many of your lives will be changed

because of that faith. After all, that's why we remember the saints, because they point to the actual one who receives all the glory, Jesus Christ, who was born, lived, died and rose again to make this all possible.

Through the saints we see on stained glass, to the saints we hear in the pages of the bible, to the saints in the rooms of our everyday life, God brings us to know Jesus Christ. That's how faith is passed on: from person to person, parent to child, spouse to spouse, friend to friend. Who passed on faith to you?

Just read through the bible and you will see time and time again how the faith was spread through ordinary lives: Mary and Elizabeth, Peter and Paul, Anna and Zechariah, Phoebe and Philemon. That's God's design and it has worked for centuries.

Our remembering All Saints Sunday today has as much to do with life now and in the future as it does with the lives of those who are

long dead. Who are the saints in your life?

I suppose if God wanted to, God could have arranged for the Holy Spirit to take hold of us in different ways. But no, God chooses to reach us through the words and deeds of people like you and all the saints, to speak through the sacraments which you come to share with your family and pass on as important. And, when we know that, it's easy to look back on our lives to see how important these gifts are.

So, dear saints and sinners, redeemed and loved, as someone passed on that faith to you, now it's your turn. For the people of God need the gifts of all the saints to point to God in this suffering world. Amen.