

A sermon preached by the Rev. Jeanne Leinbach

November 7, 2021

Isaiah 25:6-9; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44

Today we celebrate All Saints Day, one of the seven Principal Feasts of the Church. On this Feast Day, often our mind goes to celebrating those who have gone before, the holy, the devout, the virtuous: “for all the saints, who from their labors rest.” Holy is good; the saints are worthy of remembrance. Yet, the nuanced message of this Feast is for the present day. The message is communion: the priority of living life together, of learning and growing through one another in order to live into our potential, to become more fully ourselves.

Let’s start with something a little different today. Please pull out the Book of Common Prayer from the pew rack and turn to page 845. The BCP is a treasure trove of good material – much more than simply the order of service for Holy Eucharist. Here we have, beginning on page 845, *An Outline of the Faith*. You see a series of questions and answers that explain what it is that we believe. I hope you will read this outline more thoroughly at some point – Jessie, Brandon, John, and I are always happy to engage this material with you. This morning, let’s flip ahead to page 861, to the section titled “The Christian Hope.” The first question in this section: What is the Christian hope? The answer: “The Christian hope is to live with confidence in newness and fullness of life.” On the next page, page 862, about three quarters of the way down the page, see the question: What is the communion of saints? “The communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.” We’re in this together, for one another, to learn from one another, so that we become all that we are meant to be. Our growth is possible because of the newness of life.

In the Scripture appointed for today from Revelation, chapter 21, a seer named John hears a voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals.” This prophesy draws significance from a description of God’s surroundings in a previous chapter of Revelation. Back in chapter 4, John glimpses God through an open door. God exists behind this door. Now, in the new creation, God is among mortals. God is no longer far off, but immediate. The seer John hears more. The one seated on the throne says, “See, I am making all things new.” God lives with us, offering us new life every day, inspiring us to become more fully ourselves, to live into our potential, so that we might actually build the Kingdom God envisions.

Let’s take a look at “new life.” Christian Picciolini was 14 years old when he attended the first gathering of what would become a white supremacy group. Feeling accepted and significant, he embraced the messaging. “But after eight years as a neo-Nazi, Picciolini began to question the hateful ideology he espoused. He remembers a specific incident in which he was beating a young black man. His eyes locked with his victim, and he felt a surprising empathy. It was a turning point. He withdrew from the movement and in 2011 co-founded *Life After Hate*, a nonprofit that counsels members of hate groups and helps them disengage” (Dave Davies, NPR, “A Former Neo-Nazi Explains Why Hate Drew Him In— And How He Got Out,” January 18, 2018).

Paul Loeb, in his book *Soul of a Citizen* (chapter 2), tells a story about Gandhi, the civil rights leader. “Gandhi’s family mortgaged everything they had—their land, their jewelry, everything of value—to send Gandhi to law school. Gandhi graduated and passed the bar but was so shy that when he stood up in court, all he could do was stammer. He couldn’t get a sentence out in defense of his clients. As a result, he lost every one of his cases. He was a total failure as a lawyer. His family didn’t know what to do. Finally, they sent him off to South Africa, where he literally and metaphorically found his voice in challenging the country’s racial segregation.” The rest is history, as they say.

Rhoda was a long-time member of my previous parish. She was very active, singing in the choir, serving on the Altar Guild and the Churchyard Committee, playing in the Bell Choir. In addition, she devoted many hours to local charities. Though she was a role model in many ways, Rhoda was an unpleasant person. It was not easy being her friend, or her neighbor, or her fellow parishioner. Yet in the last years of her life, somehow, she broke through the bitterness that had consumed her. She became a gracious woman with a beautiful smile.

We shape God’s Kingdom. In this chapter from Revelation that we are studying this morning, we learn that written on the foundations of the city wall are the names of the twelve apostles (vs. 14). Naming the apostles on the foundations signals that we, human beings, shape God’s Kingdom. Whatever our innate gifts that can create the Kingdom God envisions, we should offer - listener, teacher, healer, nurturer. Are we in tune with ourselves to know who we are? When we are honest with our selves, does something bother us about our behavior, how we are living our lives, how we are interacting with others? The opportunity is always before us to cultivate our innate gifts, to begin anew again. We can learn from others, those who have gone before and all we live among every day. Other people can be the mirror into our souls. Let’s look into their eyes. What do we learn from them about ourselves? New life is always available to us. The one seated on the throne said, “To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.” The waters of baptism are living waters, with us every day. “Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin and have raised them to the new life of grace.” Amen.