

-Martha (“Marty”) Clansky was born August 24th, 1924. She was married to Roy Clansky and had three beautiful children: Ken, Pam, and Bill. She also had a set of amazing grandchildren: Catherine, Christian, Melissa, Will, Hannah, and Abby. Marty Clansky, who passed away late last year, was an incredible wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and yes, saint.

-In some ways, it’s kinda weird for me to say that. We aren’t used to using the word “saint” in our official descriptions of people, especially our loved ones who have died. It seems like the Roman Catholic Church has basically patented this word as of late. You can only be a saint if you do a certain number of miracles, live a monastic life, and are known by the pope. Now Marty Clansky (Abby’s grandmother) didn’t perform any miracles that I know of, didn’t live like a hermit, and she was definitely not known by the pope. Yet, I believe she was absolutely a saint to me, our family, and the world. So what makes a saint?

-The word saint comes from the latin word “sanctus” which means “holy” or “sacred”. I think where we get hung up with this is we somehow along the way have deemed “holy” or “sacred” as “perfect”. Well, I’ll tell you now: Marty Clansky was not perfect. She had struggles in relating especially to her mother in-law. She struggled to understand and support her youngest son Bill who continues to wrestle with alcoholism. She had biases and opinions. Yet, despite all of this: when you got a hug from Marty Clansky, you felt different. She was very small in stature and towards the end of her life (when I knew her), she got severe arthritis that made her fingers crooked and as she joked: “claw-like”. So when she went in for a hug, she would put her tiny little hands around you and then do a little “back and forth thing” that had to be the most meaningful thing ever. She would then say something like: “you are in my prayers and I love you!” There was no question that when you were in the moment of a Marty Clansky hug, you felt “sacred”. Perhaps you have similar memories from loved ones in your family who have passed on. Maybe saints of our time are much less perfect than we dream, yet have much more impact on us than we realize.

- One of the most powerful verses for me in this text are the very last two of this gospel section which reads: “Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Unbind him, and let him go.’” Jesus is the one, in this story, that calls Lazarus out of the tomb, but those around him were tasked with unbinding and taking off the cloth. God was the one who resurrected, the others were responsible for unbinding and setting free. What if we thought of saints not as those with divine powers who fly around doing miracles, but those who help unbind each one of us and set us free?

-I don’t think we can gather together here on this All Saints Sunday this year without heavier hearts remembering the 11 lives lost due to senseless gun violence in the Tree

of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA. There is no doubt in my mind that all 11 of these individuals were saints who followed God's life-giving call to free others. There is no doubt in my mind that all 11 of these individuals had their own struggles and challenges with God and life's uncertainties. And there is no doubt in my mind that each of these 11 individuals were robbed of their lives and taken forcefully too soon within a chaotic scene that I don't dare imagine too much because it's too evil. We certainly need to remember these lives who were taken, but I think we also need to remember some other unspoken saints who were part of this episode.

-After a firefight with police, Robert Bowers the accused shooter, was severely injured and taken to Allegheny General Hospital where he was treated. According to multiple reports, he was yelling as he was on his gurney being taken into the emergency room: "I want to kill all the Jews". If Robert Bowers only knew then about the identity of the team tasked with keeping him alive: At least three of the doctors and nurses who cared for him were Jewish, including the President of the hospital and member of Tree of Life Synagogue: Dr. Jeffrey K. Cohen. "We're here to take care of sick people," Cohen, later said "We're not here to judge you. We're not here to ask 'Do you have insurance?' or 'Do you not have insurance?' We're here to take care of people that need our help."

-If we see saints or "holy ones" as those of us, with God's help, who unbind and set the rest of us free, then these doctors and nurses truly were living out the call.

-So what is our calling on this All Saints Sunday? Do we have a role beyond just remembering who has helped unbind us and set us free?

-You know the word "remember" is interesting. It comes from several old French words: "Re" meaning "again" and "memor" which means "mindful". So, remembering is being mindful again and again in our daily lives. Thus, our remembering a saint is not just recalling the past transformative hugs of Marty Clansky, or the good deeds of doctors and nurses. It is, instead, being inspired to mindfully live out our loved ones "saintness" publically. Saintness is not static, but a living practice.

-As Jesus says in John, chapter 14: "Because I live, you also shall live."

-Ray Curtis, a dear member of our congregation, as many of you know lost his wife, Nancy, about 3 years ago to an aggressive form of cancer. Nancy was an avid walker and would walk a similar route around their house with the dog every day. Ray and Nancy struggled with missteps and misdiagnosis from Nancy's doctors that was devastating for them. "I don't want anyone else to go through what we had to go through," Ray recalled to me. And then Ray got an idea, what if there was an organization that would be a "one-stop-shop" of support and resources for cancer victims and their families? So, every year, Ray invites friends, family, and community members to go on "Nancy's walk" not only to remember her as a saint, but to give life to a new idea that will probably save lives. I haven't touched base with Ray on exactly

where this idea is at, but knowing Ray, it's going to happen. Living out saintness by unbinding others. That's what today is all about.

-But "unbinding", I believe, also stands for how we *still* relate to our loved ones as well.

-We aren't just bystanders watching the "All Saints Resurrection Game", but are participating in bringing our loved ones to this new life too. It is God's action, yes, to bring resurrection. But it is our task to unbind them from this one. In order to do this, maybe it means unbinding ourselves just as much as it means unbinding them. So this is what we are going to do in a little bit through ritual: taking off the cloth, unbinding our loved ones and ourselves in order to live this life that God has promised.

-For our practice on All Saints Sunday should be one that reminds us that this promise begins now, not in the future. Our New Testament reading from the book of Revelation stresses this a lot with a little wordplay. There is only two times when "I am the alpha and the omega" statement is used by God in this letter. Once in our passage and once at the beginning in 1:8. This "I am" statement is well known in the Greek world: the one who was, who is, and who is to come. It was used in many different places around Greek society. In 1:8, this famous statement is changed slightly: "I am the alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God. Who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." It names the present FIRST. The promise, the unbinding, begins now.

-Dr. Karoline Lewis of Luther Seminary writes: "God is our present and because God is our present that makes our future possible." We unbind our loved ones now knowing that God is our now, that they still live in our now and will be there in the future when God calls our name too. But until then, may we live out boldly their memory and saintness, unbinding and setting others free as much as we can. May God bless us in this "saint" journey both now and in the future. Amen.