

-Jaci Wilkinson, a new member here at Our Savior's and a faculty librarian at the U of M Mansfield library sent me an email about a month ago titled "NERD ALERT: NEW ARCHIVE PHOTOS OF OSL!!" Turns out, in doing research for another project, she came across some recently scanned images of our church which were really cool! I had her print some of them and put them as an item for our silent auction at the Harvest Dinner. Some of you might have seen them: one was a photo of the inside of the previous white church building decorated for Christmas, one was an old all-congregation photo from the 1940's, and the final one (my favorite) shows a crane holding the old church steeple in midair (I'm not sure if they are taking it off or putting it on the building). I particularly like this image because the scene looks a little chaotic: one man is on the roof frantically pointing to another man on the ground. The man on the ground looks like he is in mid-sentence of yelling and pointing at something outside of the picture (presumably it is the crane operator). Then you have two other guys: one is twisted mid-gesture looking up at the guy on the roof and the last guy is totally to the side of the photo by the ladder lifting his hand to his chin in a "thinking-like" pose taking it all in.

-What I appreciate most about this "steeple teetering in midair image" is how honest it is and how it makes me reimagine the situation and personalities of those in this congregation who have come before us. Most historical photos seem like they are a little posed: people standing in place looking dryly at the camera. Sometimes, we can slip into this mentality of "the glory days of Bonner" and remember our forbears as strong, perfect, faithful folks. Yet, what I think this steeple picture does so well is remind me that the saints of this church who have now passed on were not super-heros, but human beings like you and me. They had their mishaps, challenges, and mistakes, too. (maybe lifting this steeple off the church was one of them, I don't know)

-I think realizing these things about all of the saints who have passed on this last year today for All Saints Sunday is really important. If the Christian tradition is for the perfect folks, then that practice certainly can't be my practice.

-What if All Saints Sunday was a time when we were able to re-imagine and celebrate not only the strong and inspiring parts of saints, but also the chaotic and imperfect parts? Can All Saints Sunday be a time when we hold both the perfect Christmas family portrait along with the very imperfect steeple-in-mid-air photo together? Does our faith tradition have room for that or do we need to re-imagine one that does?

-I have frequent check-in phone calls with Jan Redman, a beloved member of our church and community, but one who suffers from multiple health complications that many times prevent her from being physically present here for worship. I remember she asked me, "Pastor, what does being a saint mean?"

-We have gotten used to seeing a saint kinda like that perfect Christmas Family photo, a saint is one who is most "holy" and who, in the some church traditions, is seen to

express an aspect of faith in an almost perfect way. This is why, for example, the Roman Catholic Church takes great pains to nominate someone officially as a “saint” because they have to go back and verify an aspect of this person’s faith was done in the most upright manner. It is true, the word “saint” comes from the latin word “sanctus” which in the liturgy just means “holy”. Holiness and perfection through the generations seem to go hand in hand. But the word saint was also formed from another Latin word: “sancio” which literally means “sacred”. As words often do, they form from a combination of older words which many times together point at a deeper meaning. It seems to me when we think of “saint”, we tend to think more of the “holy” part and have forgotten more of the “sacred” part.

-A saint, in it’s simplest form, is someone sacred to God, and to us. They of course made a lot of mistakes, did mean things to others sometimes, said things they weren’t proud of, but yet through God’s grace they are still sacred.

-I think seeing a saint as someone “sacred”, not as someone perfectly “holy” is the perspective that Jesus is coming from in his famous Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew which we read a bit of today. Though these words of Jesus have been set to many perfectly formed melodies and have influenced many poets to write great works, let’s pay attention to what Jesus is saying. He isn’t lifting up the kings and queens, the perfect priests or monks, he’s lifting up the poor, hungry, and the outcast: vagrant beggars who can’t sustain themselves or their families, who are hard to look at, and are a drain on the system. The saints for Jesus are not royal winners, but outcast losers.

-Dr. David Lose, President of Philadelphia Lutheran Seminary wrote a commentary titled: “Jesus is for losers.” He writes: “In the face of these verses and on All Saints Sunday in particular we are forced to contend with the fact that we, too, are losers. We -- and here I will particularly address those in a similar socio-economic bracket to myself -- put great effort into convincing ourselves and those around us otherwise. We dress well. We live in nice homes. We work hard to be upwardly mobile. But no matter how hard we try, we are still racked by insecurities, still find it hard to love ourselves or others, still destined at the end of all of our striving for a hole in the ground. We, too, are losers, and unless we recognize and confess that -- not as something to be ashamed of, mind you, but rather as one of the defining elements of our existence -- we will have a hard time receiving the mercy and forgiveness, grace and life Jesus offers.”

-Jesus is for losers like you, like me, like the saints that came before us.

-I remember as a kid I loved the game of Scrabble. We would play it at our family cabin in northern Minnesota all the time. I loved the game of Scrabble, that is, until as 12 year old I figured out I was no match for my mom who was quite a word “extraordinaire” and seemed to crush me every time. (maybe some of you have had a similar experience) As a 12 year old, your pretty egocentric and when you don’t win, it’s rough. I remember my grandma, knowing that she was going to get beat but enjoying the game with her family

anyways, putting down super funny made-up words for the heck of it (no one was going to tell her what to do). Some of the words were so ridiculous (like “mookenspritz”) and made us laugh so hard that we had to give her the points. Sometimes the real the saints are the ones not winning the game, but losing in inspiring ways.

-Jesus is for losers. May we remember our loved ones faithfully this morning not for maybe what “they won”, but for what “they lost”. May the saints of our church and the saints of our lives, the sacred ones, compel us to live more faithful lives of love and grace. Amen.