

Problem: What does it mean to celebrate the saints on All-Saints Sunday?

-One year ago, some of you may remember, my family took a trip to Washington D.C. to bury my grandfather: a former colonel and a military chaplain in the United States army. When you rise to the rank of colonel, you then qualify for an impressive funeral display which includes a riderless horse, horse drawn hearse, honor guard, and military band. Our family (which numbered about 30 people) were outnumbered by about 150 military personnel. After having the funeral service in the Arlington Chapel, this large parade moved about 1 mile to the gravesite where my grandfather now rests. It was an incredible experience that I will remember for the rest of my life.

-Arlington cemetery buries over 100 people a day and there are services going on everywhere. Infact, a vivid memory I have while parading in this huge ensemble to my grandfather's grave site is seeing another service going on for another soldier. This one only consisted of 4 four people, the chaplain and three soldiers holding flags. It was very clear that no family came to this graveside service, but yet Arlington was following its protocol and providing a funeral anyways. It was a big contrast to the mass of music and people involved for my grandfather's service.

-I have thought a lot about this contrasting image this last week leading up to All-Saints Sunday. Who was that other soldier being buried? Did he/she even have family left? What is the difference between them and my grandfather? Would he/she be considered a saint just like I hold my grandfather to be?

Solution: Saints live out the Sermon on the Plain by showing that everyone (and the earth) matter.

-We Lutherans sometimes get uncomfortable during All Saints Day. Not because we don't love and respect those who have passed, but because our tradition doesn't really focus a lot on saints and sainthood. The Roman Catholic tradition, famously, sees saints as very important intercessors. It's kind of similar to me not really being able to call up the White House and have a personal conversation with President Obama. In order for me to get my request in I need to have an intercessor: a mailman to deliver a letter or congressperson/senator to hear me out and maybe bring up a bill. Martin Luther and the Reformation did a lot to change the understanding of God and make God more personable and accessible. Why go to a saint to plead my case when I can go right to God?

-So, even though this concept of being an intercessor is not as important to our faith tradition, I still believe saints are incredibly vital to our church and faith practice.

-To see how they are important, one needs to look at our gospel text today in Luke which is commonly known as the Sermon on the Plain or the Beatitudes. "Blessed are you who are poor for yours in the Kingdom of God."

-I have been asked many times by friends or other people of different faith traditions: "What does being a follower of Jesus Christ mean?" It's an interesting, and I believe for

many of us, a very complex question to think about: one that can have many well thought out answers. But, what I always find myself coming back to when trying to explain what the Christian faith is for me is this text (Beatitudes). This text, for me, is the core of living out my faith in Jesus Christ. Because when you boil it all down (and there is a lot to boil down here), I believe you get this: faith in Christ is living like everyone and everything matter. Faith in Christ is living like everyone and everything matter.

-Everyone (especially the poor and the outcast) matters. Everything (especially the natural world and habitat) matters.

-It's so simple, and yet SO hard. Living like everyone and everything matters. Yet there are those, many of whom are loved ones, who are and who have lived this out in incredible ways. This is I believe why we need saints. This why all of those whom we are remembering today are saints. Not because they were perfect or did miracles, but because they lived out the best they could the fact that we and others matter.

Implication: Remembering the saints is a holy act that can remind us that our loved ones and us matter to God.

- Which brings me back to my grandfather and the other soldier. I know that the other soldier being buried at the same time as my grandfather was a saint for somebody just like my grandfather was to me. I know they loved and saw others as mattering. I know they served their country, friends/family as best as they could, though not perfectly. Finally, I know they made an impression on somebody, teaching them a little bit more about God's radical love and grace. At the end of the day, this person I believe is just as much of a saint as my grandfather and for that I give thanks.

-We all need to give thanks, that is what this day is about. Celebrating those who have been saints for us, those who have showed us a little more how we matter.

- One of the hardest things still as pastor, at least for me, is doing a funeral for someone you don't really know. You get all of the stories and memories, all of the tears from love ones, and then you find yourself sitting in front of a blank computer screen wondering what to write. Many times I think to myself: what am I going to say to do justice to this whole person's life? I was having a conversation about this fact with another pastor, Pastor Molly at Immanuel Lutheran in Missoula, and she mentioned how for her funeral she wants the pastor to get up and say: she's passed on, she wasn't perfect, she tried her best, she's loved and with God and her savior. At the end of the day, that's probably like most of us and most of our loved ones....in fact we and they are probably the last thing one would associate as a typical "saint".

-But treating someone else like they matter doesn't have to be perfect. As Jesus is pointing out, we just need to put in the effort. That's what we celebrate today, not the perfection.

-May our All-Saints Day be one filled with awe and memories. May we celebrate those whom we still love and miss. May we not be afraid to see all of those passed on as

saints who at some point in their lives, though maybe not perfectly, made us feel like we matter. Amen.