

“Human Becomings”

1 John 3: 1-3

As we gather to remember those we have lost this past year, our saints in the faith, the irony of the title “saint” is not lost on me. We as Disciples struggle with this title. We think that it is too much like Catholic-sounding language for us to use or when we hear the title “saints of the church”, we assume that it is referring to people who have done amazing things while they were alive or performed huge, life-changing miracles to receive this title, people like Mother Teresa. we say to ourselves, we will never be able to be like Mother Teresa or Saint Francis, or any other pillars of faith. They were special. We are just ordinary people. Because in our minds, when we hear the word “saint”, images of pious people immediately come to mind, images of people with their eyes lovingly lifted, gazing at the heavens, hands folded in prayer, and of course, the ethereal glow of a halo surrounding their heads. These are the images of the “saints” of the church for us as disciples and if we are honest with ourselves, we shift uncomfortably in our seats when the title “saint” gets applied to those of us gathered in the pews, just ordinary people, who are doing the best we can to do to live out the Gospel message in our daily lives.

I will admit I was like that at one point. I remember in my ordination service, one of my professors asked me if I believed myself now that I was ordained to be a saint of the church. I remember vehemently shaking my head no and then turning to see if she was talking to someone else. I remember thinking, Surely there is someone standing behind me who actually deserves the title “saint”, someone who has all the answers, someone who fully embodies the love Christ in his or her life, someone who when any one meets this particular person, they just know that this person is something more than just ordinary. I remember thinking, that this person, whoever he or she may be, was the saint, and it was definitely not me.

That was my thought and understanding of “saints of the church” until this summer when I was introduced to a new way of thinking. I attended a conference this past August led by an Episcopal priest who introduced me to the spiritual discipline of communing with the saints daily. The first day of the retreat she shared with us the story of a preacher/friar who had spent his life preaching and he had founded the monastic movement called the Dominicans, someone in my mind who deserved the title saint. He gave his life for the gospel, preaching and devoting himself to study, living with God’s word. The next day, the leader shared the story of Herman of Alaska, a missionary to Aleuts. She shared how this not so well known monk lived out the gospel message in Alaska, first by thinking his mission

was to convert the “heathens” but soon realized that his mission transformed into protecting the natives from exploitation and abuse. And by the end of his life, he had become a living sanctuary for the natives in the area. On the last day, this Episcopal priest shared the story of Clare of Assisi, a young woman who was so moved by the words of Francis of Assisi that she left her life of wealth, took up a vow of poverty, and devoted her life to caring for the poor in her hometown.

At first, when the leader of the retreat started sharing this daily discipline, I was skeptical. I wondered how any of this related to self-care, the real reason I was there at the retreat but I will admit by the end of the week, I anxiously awaited the story of our saint for the day. I found myself mesmerized by their stories, and renewed by their stories. I found myself surrounded by believers from the past who knew the church, who loved the church, who had experienced the same things that I was experiencing, the doubts, the fears, the amazement, the wonderings of just exactly how was God working in my life.. I found myself connected across generations, across centuries, to people who had their lives so transformed by the Gospel message, had their lives so transformed by God’s love that they could do nothing else but act, proclaiming that the Kingdom of God had come near for all of God’s children. With each passing day with the saints, I was reminded why I became a person of faith in the first place. I was reminded why I find comfort and strength in my calling as a follower of Jesus, because I know that I am a part of

something bigger than myself. I was reminded that our connection with God endures. I was reminded that it is God's powerful love that binds us together as believers, past, present and future.

Because the amazing blessing of this spiritual discipline that I have come to realize is that yes these saints were something special, not because they were gifted with more gifts of the Spirit than me, not because they were gifted with more faith than me, and not because they were better people than me. The reason why they are called saints of the church is because they left us the example of what happens when we truly embrace what it means to be a child of God and became the people that God created us to be. They left us the example of what it means to be a disciple of Christ by living out their lives as beloved and loving children of God. Through their experience of God's transformative love, these saints became the people that God created them to be and inspire us to do the same: to embrace our calling as children of God and become the people that God created us to be, to become more Christ like in all that we do, to become kingdom people who practice justice, who show mercy, and who walk humbly with our God, to become all that we were called to be and to live up to our kingdom potential as children of God.

The blessing of these saints' stories is that they remind us that they were just ordinary people like us, they were human beings just like us, flawed and imperfect, people who were just trying to live out the Gospel message, trying to live out the

promises of the Kingdom of God in their lives. The blessing of their stories is that they remind us what happens when we truly embrace the understanding that God's love calls us to become more than what we are now, to become more like Christ in our actions, to become more like the people God created us to be, to become the people that God calls us to be. The blessing of their stories is that they remind us that we are more than we think we are: We are more than just ordinary people, trying to live our lives the best way we know how. We are children of God. We are people who are so loved by God that God sent God's only son for us. We are people who are vessels of light for a world that is in darkness. We are people who are called to proclaim that the Kingdom of God has come near. We are people who will become more like Christ when we see him and experience him more fully in our lives

The reason why we lift up these saints of the church is to remind ourselves now and always that ordinary people become so much more when they respond to the call of discipleship. They become the people that God called and created them to be.

And that for us is the good news and the starting point on our journeys to becoming the people God created us to be. We know that we are already claimed and named as beloved children of God which is great but the blessing doesn't end there. When we embrace our title as children of God, as saints of the church, we

are recognizing that being a child of God involves more than: more than just who we think we are, more than what our limited thinking allows us to comprehend, more than what our limited vision allows us to see, more than what others say we have the ability to do and change. Being a child of God involves becoming someone who recognizes that God has already called us by name, that God has chosen us before the founding of the world. It involves becoming someone who recognizes that God has promised to do great things through for the sake of all of God's children whom God loves so much.

Being a child of God involves becoming someone who lives out in their lives, who shares, who continues to reveal the same love in all that they do and say that God has share with all of us. Being a child of God involves becoming the people that God created us to be and living up to our full kingdom potential, just like all those who have gone on before us, leaving their examples of faith, hope and love.

Today, we lift up the saints of the church and remember their work and their ministry. Today, we remember the gifts that God gave them to build up the Body of Christ, gifts that healed, gifts that brought justice, gifts that inspired, gifts that showed love, gifts that brought the Kingdom of God near. Today, we remember how these saints of the church changed lives by their example, inspiring us to become the people that God created us to be.

Though a sad day, the blessing and grace of All Saints' Day is a reminder that we are not alone on our journey of faith. We are surrounded by a multitude that has walked the journey before us and they stand in solidarity with us as we continue on our way. We are surrounded by glimpses of those who will walk this journey after us and these possibilities of hope and new life stand in solidarity as we live out the vision of the Kingdom of God here on earth. We can do all these amazing and life giving things because we know that our God is in control. We know that our God is so much more than our limited understanding can comprehend.

The blessing of All Saints Day is that we hold onto the promise that this world does not have the last word, that even death cannot prevent the Kingdom of God from being experienced by all the children of God, that even death cannot prevent us from becoming more than we could ever imagine, that even death cannot sever God's love, the tie that binds us together, past, present, and future.

As we lift up our saints, the people who shaped us, the people who saw more in us than we could see ourselves, the people who loved us more than we could ever imagine, we celebrate the knowledge that they are not forgotten. Their stories and their examples of faith stay with us and continue to inspire us to become the people that God created us to be.

As we lift up our saints, we are called to remember how they touched our lives and helped us become the people we are today and celebrate the fact that when the Kingdom of God is fully realized here on earth, we will be together with them again. In that beautiful moment, we will embrace. We will share our stories. We will share in the new life promised to us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we will become more than we could ever imagine. We will truly become children of God, redeemed, transformed and free.

Until then, we will become the people that God created us to be here on earth, sharing God's transformative love with all the children of God.

May we always remember that we are called children of God, becoming the people God created us to be, becoming all that God calls us to be. Amen.