

REACHING FOR LIGHT

The Rev. Geoff Parker to Foreside Community Church - Falmouth, ME

Sunday, November 3, 2019

Scripture: [Ephesians 1:11–23](#)

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCRIPTURE

For All Saints Sunday, we'll read from the Letter to the Ephesians... an early church seeking to know how they were connected and formed into a new community in Christ. At this point in biblical scholarship, we're pretty sure that this letter wasn't written by the apostle Paul himself, but by a later follower in his teaching and his line, in some cases developing or slightly changing parts of his theology. You could say that the author "looked up" to Paul, and took the gifts that they received in his teaching and gave them in a new way.

In the text, you'll hear words about the "inheritance" in Christ and in the saints. It's something about our American ideals that I think inheritance almost always has a little bit of a negative spin on it... inheritance suggests that you might not have the capability to make it on your own... I would just say, none of us can make it on our own, and that for an author in this time period to talk inheritance was to talk about the stuff of life... families desperately needed to hand down from generation to generation those things which could give life.

So listen for what has been prepared for us...

SERMON

We started this series by talking about our roots, those things which we have inherited genetically or historically in the faith, which form part of our story that can ground us.

Just the same, we also need to turn to those who stretch us, who teach us to reach for the light which will sustain us and help us reach new heights.

All Saints Day started as a celebration of all the of the canonical saints of the catholic church, apostles, martyrs, teachers who lived in such a way that when they died, people were absolutely certain that they were connected deeply into the heart of God, and could even be a conduit to knowing more about that same heart.

I'll be brave and call lots of people, "saints." If you've been paying attention recently, you've noticed that I've been getting us ready for this day by calling you all saints... and our pilgrim and puritan ancestors were absolutely certain that to be a member of the church you had to be a saint, a "visible saint" no less... and that by being the saint you are, you could call other people into life among us.

You might think you have to be especially “holy” to be a saint... but I would tell you, if you *must* be “saintly” to be a saint, fair enough, but I don’t recommend it, and I don’t think God needs it. I think we can be as messy as we are, but need the reminder to try to love God and our neighbor with all we are, and somehow God makes saints of us, just the same.

If you don’t believe me, on October 31, 1999, my college room mate Mikhal went out on a fire escape. This was not uncommon for him, he used to move from room to room in our freshman dorm on the outside of the building, three or four stories up.

He loved loud music, and strange sounds: we would record odd instrumental music with a beginner cello that I used to carry around... I think there was a digerdoo involved. Our room was mostly built out of cigarette butts, which he would smoke endlessly with his headphones on, sweating over some sound. He was also quiet. People came to our room to sit and cry in the way that you have to when you’re 19, and he would be kind and simply make space for them... including me more than once.

Mikhal fell off the building 20 years ago. He died instantly. We held a very overrought memorial at school. Most of us struggled hard for a few years to figure out how to be friends again, some of us never did figure it out.

I know that the awful memorial fueled a desire deep in me to make sure that people are remembered for who they were deep in their core. I know that there is part of him in me every time I get up in front of people and talk... and every time I sit next to someone and fall silent. I know that his story is somehow part of my story, even in ministry... which I know would make him laugh pretty hard... I don’t think he was theologically inclined.

There are saints in this world that have lived lives openly enough that “your heart might be enlightened”, and you might know the love of God and your place in the body of Christ, the body of everything that is, and maybe even here in the church.

We often talk about remembering saints... and literally, I think that’s some of what we do, we *re-member* them into our body and our lives as a community.

A necessary side-effect of my job is that people ask me about what I think happens after we die *all the time*. Nevermind the fact that Jesus was deeply concerned about how we live... people have to ask. Usually when I preach I try and not editorialize a whole bunch, but here’s what I feel I need to say about my own sense of it.

I think that energy is conserved. I see that in the world around me. I also think that love is energy, I feel that in the world around me. So I have decided that love is conserved. That those people who loved us into life and through life... love us beyond life. That the energy that they have contributed to our world in love lives on: somehow, inexplicably.

We perceive this in the ways in which we find them in our own being: thinking, feeling, long after they have gone from where I can see them. I find this in the ways in which we are never the same from having known them, or sometimes even without knowing them.

“Nothing ever really ends.” ^[1] wrote the Unitarian minister, The Rev. Dr. Mary Harrington on October 24, 2010, as she looked out over the salt marsh in Maine.

She died two days later of ALS. I never met her. Which is unendingly sad for me at one level. But I know the truth of her words: I met her daughter a few years later. And we fell in love and got married. And every day I will tell you that I know some gift of her ministry, some piece of her that Julia carries, and through that I inherited her love for all her creatures... for naming even the wild things that pass by the window... I see her struggles and her amazing successes in her daughter in her family, and in my life and love that I share.

Nothing ever really ends: we are shaped by the inheritance of those who love us and call us to be more whole, more loving, and more just. We are, slowly and lovingly, being transformed by one another....

What kind of saint do you want to be?

So, I want to leave you with this piece from the pastor Steve Garnaas-Holmes:

To be a saint is to be sanctified;
set apart for a sacred purpose.
That would be you.
Every breath of your life is for a sacred purpose:
to shed light, to radiate God's love.
You don't have to be influential,
or pious, virtuous or pure.
You have to be yourself.
The You of you is what God has made holy.
You are God's Beloved.
All you have to do is act like it.
Everything you do today is an opportunity
to embody God's love,
not by your effort or skill,
but by the love you embody.
The light of God is in you.
Be transparent to it. ^[2]

Thanks be to God we have received this inheritance of love in the saints and in Christ Jesus, who fills all in all... who connects us in one body through all the generations and life we share... who is present in our love and makes saints of such unlikely stuff as us. Amen.

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1. Harrington, Mary. *Duck Dreams - Loose Ends* ↩
 2. Garnaas-Holmes, Steve. *All Saints Day* ↩