

Sermons at
First Lutheran Church (ELCA)
Reggie Denton, Pastor

November 1, 2020 (All Saints Sunday, Year A)
Matthew 5:1-12

There was a church that had beautiful stained-glass windows in it. One day in Sunday school, the teacher brought the children to the sanctuary and pointed the windows out to them. Each window in that church had an image of one of the saints. The teacher asked the children if they knew what a saint was. One of the children looked intently at the windows glowing in the morning light, and then she quickly raised her hand and gave her answer: "A saint is a person who lets God's light shine through them," she said. The teacher thought that was the best answer she had ever heard.

"A saint is a person who lets God's light shine through them." A story. (*The author is unknown.*)

As I faced my Maker at the last Judgment, I knelt before the Lord along with the other souls. Before each of us lay our lives, like the squares of a quilt, in many piles.

An Angel sat before each of us sewing our quilt squares together into a tapestry that represented each of our lives. But, as my Angel took each piece of cloth off the pile, I noticed how ragged and empty each of my squares was. They were filled with giant holes. Each square was labeled with a part of my life that had been difficult, the challenges and temptations that I had faced in life. I saw hardships that I had endured, which were the largest holes of all.

I glanced around me. Nobody else seemed to have such squares. Other than a tiny hole here and there, the other tapestries were filled with rich color and the bright hues of worldly fortune. I gazed upon my own life and was disheartened. My Angel was sewing the ragged pieces of cloth together, threadbare and empty, like binding air.

Finally the time came when each life was to be displayed, held up to the light, the scrutiny of truth. The others rose, each in turn, holding up their tapestries. So filled their lives had been.

My Angel looked upon me, and nodded for me to rise. My gaze dropped to the ground in shame. I hadn't had all the earthly fortunes. I had love in my life, and laughter. But there had also been trials of illness and death, and adversity that took from me my world as I knew it. I had to start over many times. I often struggled with the temptation to quit, only to somehow muster the strength to pick up and begin again. I had spent many nights on my knees in prayer, asking for help and guidance in my life. I had often been held up to ridicule, which I endured painfully, each time offering it up to the Father in hopes that I would not melt beneath the judgmental gaze of those who UNFAIRLY judged me. And now, I had to face the truth. My life WAS what it was, and I had to accept it for what it had been.

I rose and slowly lifted the combined squares of my life to the light. An awe-filled GASP filled the air. I gazed around at the others who stared at me with eyes wide. Then, I looked upon the tapestry before me. Light flooded the many holes, creating an image. It was the face of Christ.

Then our Lord STOOD before me, with warmth and love in His eyes. He said, "Every time you gave over your life to Me, it became My life, My hardships, and My struggles. Each point of light in your life is when you stepped aside and let Me shine through, until there was more of Me than there was of you.

May all our quilts allow Christ to shine through.

Now I know that story is little sentimental, but I don't care. Sometimes we need to set aside our cynicism and GET sentimental. There's a reason these kinds of stories TOUCH our HEARTS – because we can place OURSELVES in them.

Most of US don't consider ourselves to be saints either. We imagine that glorious host arrayed in white and we think, "I don't deserve that. I'm not worthy."

But then, what IS a saint? A saint is a person who let's God's light shine through them. Consider whom Jesus calls saints: "Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are those who mourn...Blessed are the meek...Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness." Not the people you would EXPECT to be blessed. In other words, blessed are those who KNOW they NEED God. They know they have nothing but holes in their quilts, so they let God's LIGHT shine through them.

As I look out at all of you, I see the saints of God. None of you may think that you're a saint (well, maybe a couple of you do), but you let God's light shine through you. You may not feel like much of a saint, but it's not about what WE think. God's opinion is the only one that matters. And God's mind is made up. You are God's child, made so in baptism, and like any good parent, when we say, "Why am I a saint?" God, the Father says, "Because I SAID so."

When I think of the saints of my life, I know they didn't think of THEMSELVES as saints either, but they let God's light shine through them. I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for all the saints who put up with me and all my questions, and told me the stories of Jesus, who taught me in college religion classes and in seminary, who guided me when I was confused, and put their arm around me when I wanted to give up, who inspired me to want to be a better person. I'm thinking of a multitude that I couldn't possibly count today. A list that today now includes the name Don Hagestuen. I can still him sitting right there with Sonya.

MY list of saints goes on and on. NONE of them would have considered themselves saints, but they were to me.

Consider who the saints of YOUR life are. Who helped shape your faith? Who lifted you up when you were weak? Take a moment and think about that. Who were the saints of your life?

We stand on the shoulders of giants. THEY may not have thought so, but they were to YOU. They let God's light shine through them.

You see, in life, we pass things on. We share all that we ARE, all our hopes and dreams, with the ones we care about. And when we die, THOSE are the things that stay with them. We leave a legacy that is greater than any treasure — we give them OURSELVES.

All Saints' Day gives us an opportunity to think about OUR legacy. What are YOU going to pass on to the ones you love? Your kindness, your gentle spirit, your generous heart, the faith you share? You are the saints of God. This is your legacy. And this PLACE is part of OUR legacy.

Together, on this All Saints' Sunday, in the memory and presence of those who have gone before you, in the promise of those who follow you, and in your confession that you need God, that ALL you have are HOLES in your life's quilt, DEAR SAINTS, let God's light shines through you.

Let us pray. O God, we give you thanks for ALL the saints, the great, the not so great, the courageous, the faithful, the bold ones, and even the timid ones, who loved you each in their own way, and time, and place, showing us the WAY to eternal life. May WE show OTHERS. Amen.

And Amen.