

Wesley United Methodist Church

Rev. Beverly E Stenmark

November 5, 2017

Dwelling and Indwelling

Text: I Thessalonians 2:9-13

Matthew 23:1-12

Title: The Pillar of Nurture

“They lived not only in ages past; there are hundreds of thousands still. The world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus’ will. You can meet them in school, on the street, in the store, in church, by the sea, in the house next door; they are saints of God, whether rich or poor, and I mean to be one too.”ⁱ

I really like that song, and I love that last verse because it reminds me of both the possibilities and the responsibilities for each and every one of us. I didn’t come from a religious background that placed a lot of emphasis on saints – but I always thought of saints as people who were larger than life, people who did miraculous things – people very different from me and all the other people I knew.

By the way, I decided to Google “saints” to get an official definition. Of the first 10 items that came up 8 of them were articles about the NFL Football team, The New Orleans Saints. That wasn’t exactly what I was looking for. However, I finally found the definition of a saint as a person who is “recognized as having an exceptional degree of holiness or likeness or closeness to God”.ⁱⁱ Within the Roman Catholic Church there is a process of veneration and canonization for those who are deemed worthy to be honored in a special way. Probably none of the people for whom we lit candles today will ever fit into that category – but they are saints for us – people who have nurtured us in our lives and in our faith; people who made

a difference; people who we want to remember even long after they have died; people who really are just like us.

The fourth pillar of our construction here is the Pillar of Nurture and today we celebrate and remember those who have nurtured us. However, it doesn't stop there. We also have a responsibility to nurture others – to encourage others in their life and in their faith journey.

On this day, the followers of God are challenged to become the saints of God. Life's difficulties are not ignored or downplayed, but comfort is assured through the love and grace of God. God's power and glory are honored, even as the sufferings of this life are recognized. We worship God and we pray for God's comfort. We find the hope and the faith to become the saints of God.ⁱⁱⁱ

Today's pillar of nurture reminds us of the relationship that is to exist and thrive among followers of Christ. We hear Paul talk about treating the people of Philippi as a father treats his children, urging and encouraging them. Earlier, he talked about treating them as a nurse who cares for and nurtures her own children. Matthew's gospel reminds us not to look at ourselves or others as people of power, parading around so that everyone can see the things they are doing. "The greatest among you will be your servant," says Jesus in this passage. He reminds those to whom he was speaking, and us, today, not to make religion a burden for people to try to carry, but rather that we should reach out to others, to serve others. God is constantly at work caring, loving, healing in and through us.

When I hear these passages, and when I think about the relationships we should have among each other, relationships of nurture and support I think about the idea of mentors. Adults have often been considered a success in life have often had a mentor in their early years.

I think most of us have had someone who has taught us by words and mostly by example how to live in meaningful ways.

One of my mentors in pastoral ministry is one of the saints of this church – Rev. David Ripley. He greatly influenced my idea of who a pastor is and what a pastor does. I pray that my ministry has been a way of honoring Dave as my mentor. Along the way, there have been many other pastors and lay persons who have served as mentors to me, people who were in my life at a particular time and who taught me many valuable things. Through the years, I have also served as an official mentor to some new pastors starting in their ministry. I have served as a supervisor and unofficial mentor to other pastors along the way. I pray that I have passed along to them some of the most valuable things I learned from Dave. One of the great things about mentors is that they are not trying to gain recognition and the reality is that most mentors will never know what difference they have made in someone's life.

The important thing is that this kind of relationship is something that is meant to be part of each of our lives. We are all called to turn back and to offer a hand to those who come behind us. Certainly, we do that as parents or grandparents, but we are also called to be in that kind of relationship with many others. We are called to notice the places of vulnerability, places where people need to be encouraged, guided, and nurtured as they take risks and explore the unfamiliar. We are called to reach back from the areas of our strength – the places where we have been, the things we have learned – to share with others the gifts that we have received along the way.

However, an important part of our faith reminds us that we have never arrived. We are always growing; so we are also called to lean

forward and seek a hand of guidance in the areas where we need help, to reach out to others who can offer what we most need at the time. This doesn't mean that we are always reaching out to someone who is older than us, but rather to someone who has experiences from which we can learn. I am grateful to some of my colleagues from ethnic backgrounds different than mine – I have learned a lot about the privileges in my life simply by being white. I have learned about assumptions that I make, about places where I am blind simply because I have never had an experience that helps me to see what they see. I am grateful that they have been willing to nurture and mentor me.

Each and every one of us has much to **learn** from those around us. Each and every one of us has much to **share** with those around us. We can and should be nurtured by others, just as we nurture others while we all explore being and becoming the people God has called us to be.

I love to read and to listen to audio books in the car. This week I finished listening to a true story that has become a popular new movie – Same Kind of Different as Me by Ron Hall and Denver Moore. Denver Moore was a homeless man who until the day he died could not read a word. Ron and Deborah Hall were people with a large house and lots of money. A large part of the story involves their faith journey. Near the end of the story, Denver describes his purpose in life simply by saying, “I am a nobody, that is trying to tell everybody about somebody who can save anybody.” He is talking about Jesus and wanting everyone to know about Jesus. The three became friends and mentors to each other in amazing ways.

In Denver's last words in the book, he says, “I used to spend a lot of time worrying that I was different from other people, and even from other

homeless folk. Then after I met Miss Debbie and Mr. Ron, I spent so much time worrying that I was so different that we weren't going to have any kind of future. But I found out everybody is different, the same kind of different as me. We're all just regular folks walking down the road that God done set in front of us. The truth about it is, whether we is rich or poor or something in between, this earth ain't no final resting place; so in a way we is all homeless, just working our way toward home."^{iv}

I think he sums it up nicely. We are all people on a journey and we need each other as we make our way through life. As people who love our Lord, we are made strong in God's love and we are called to nurture and to be nurtured, to mentor and to be mentored by our companions on the journey.

ⁱ Scott, Lesbia, "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God", United Methodist Hymnal #712

ⁱⁱ Wikipedia

ⁱⁱⁱ Abingdon Worship Annual 2017 Supplement "All Saints Day" adapted

^{iv} Hall, Ron and Moore, Denver. Same Kind of Different as Me,