

Wesley United Methodist Church      Rev. Beverly E Stenmark  
November 4, 2018  
Title: Saints for Today  
Scripture: Revelation 21:1-6a  
John 11:32-44

As we observe All Saints Day, we remember the people who are important to us but who no longer walk with us on this earth. All Saints Day was really a few days ago – on November 1<sup>st</sup>, but because it seldom falls on a Sunday, we often celebrate it on the first Sunday in November.

Growing up, I never thought much about saints. Unlike my Roman Catholic friends who talked about and prayed to some of the saints, that wasn't part of my religious background growing up in the Methodist Church. However, John Wesley, the person we recognize as the founder of Methodism, called All Saints Day a "festival I truly love." He said, "I always find this to be a comfortable day."<sup>i</sup>

To be clear, Wesley did not find any reason to venerate or invoke saints, but he believed that the church was composed not only of those who are currently alive, but also all those who have gone before us, the great communion of saints.

All Saints Day then becomes a day to remember not only those famous ones who have gone before us, but also the more obscure – the ones known and remembered only by those in whose hearts they continue to live. The hymn we just sang speaks to this well.

As the hymn says, the saints of God are those who "toiled and fought and lived and died for the Lord they loved and knew. ... They loved the Lord, ... and his love made them strong, and they followed the right for Jesus' sake the whole of their good lives long. ..."<sup>ii</sup>

Does that sound like some of the people we have remembered today as we lit candles to remember those who have been an important part of our lives and who no longer walk on the earth with us?

As the song says, “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.”<sup>iii</sup>

One of the saints who recently joined the great cloud of witnesses is the Rev. Eugene Peterson who was the author of the popular biblical paraphrase, “The Message”. There were some who thought the paraphrase did not take the scripture seriously, but many others – myself included – found the paraphrase a helpful way to understand and hear the words of the Bible in a way that spoke to our hearts and helped us hear familiar words in a new way.

Bishop Devadhar wrote about this in a letter he sent this week on All Saints Day. In “The Message”, Peterson paraphrased the third verse of the reading from Revelation in this way, “I heard a voice thunder from the Throne: ‘Look! Look! God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women! They’re his people, he’s their God. He’ll wipe every tear from their eyes.’”

“God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women!” What a wonderful image! Bishop Devadhar asked, “What would it look like if we truly believed God is in our neighborhoods and acted out that belief sincerely? How different would our neighborhoods be?”<sup>iv</sup>

To invite us to think about what difference it would make if we really did believe that God was in our neighborhoods, he mentioned several

recent events. He recalled the atrocity in which innocent worshipers were slaughtered last week in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. He also mentioned the three young children in Indiana who were killed while boarding their school bus this week. He talked about people fleeing persecution and hunger only to be turned away from sanctuary and relief and at the same time remembered that many in the Merrimack Valley are still without heat after the gas explosions as winter approaches.

In Peterson's paraphrase, "God has moved into the neighborhood, making his home with men and women!" God has moved into Pittsburgh, and a small town in Indiana, and the Merrimack Valley. God is walking with people fleeing persecution and hunger and seeking asylum and safety. God has moved into our neighborhood here in Lincoln and into this very sanctuary. God will be standing with us on Tuesday when we go to cast our ballots. God is sitting with us in the hospital waiting room and standing with the doctor when we hear the words we didn't want to hear.

Not only has God moved into the neighborhood to live among us, God will also wipe every tear from our eyes according to the passage from Revelation. In John's gospel, we heard about Jesus at the home of Mary and Martha when their brother Lazarus had died. We heard that Jesus wept. God, in Jesus, knows our pain and experiences our emotions with us. Jesus wept – even though only minutes later, Jesus would call Lazarus to come out of the tomb and would restore him to earthly life.

The one who called Lazarus to come out of the tomb, is the one who cries with us when our hearts are broken, but also wipes away our tears and offers us hope and healing.

Bishop Devadhar reminded us that one definition of saint is "agent of God" and asks how we can become saints for those who are suffering.

This week, several times I saw people referring to Mister Rogers and the way he once told children that when something bad happened, his mother told him to look for the helpers. He urged children to look for the helpers – the medical people, the fire fighters, the people who help others. Most of the articles I read, reminded us that Mister Rogers words were for children, young children, and that we, the adults, are the ones who are to be the helpers. We are to be the agents of God, the ones who reach out to those who are suffering.

That may be why some of the saints we remembered today were so important to us. They were the people who were agents of God. They were the helpers. They were the ones who reached out to us and to others in many ways. They were the ones who made a difference in our lives and the lives of others. That's why they were and are the saints in our lives.

The article I read about John Wesley and All Saints Day included these words, "Alongside the likes of Paul from the New Testament, Augustine, Martin Luther, and John and Charles Wesley, we tell stories of the grandmother who took us to church every Sunday. We remember the pastor who prayed with us in the hospital, and the neighbor who changed the oil in the family car. We give thanks for the youth leader who told us Jesus loved us, the kindergarten Sunday school teacher who showered us with that love, and the woman in the church who bought us groceries when we were out of work.

"Retelling these stories grounds us in our history. These memories teach us how God has provided for us through the generosity and sacrifice of those who have come before us. The stories of the saints encourage us to be all God has created us to be.

“We think of the inspirational people with whom we worship on Sunday, and those across the world we will never meet. ...We give thanks for those with whom we agree, as well as those whose views we do not share. ... On All Saints Day, we recognize that we are part of a giant choir singing the same song. It is the song Jesus taught his disciples, a tune that has resonated for more than 2,000 years; a melody sung in glory and on the earth. Our great privilege is to add our voices to this chorus.

“On All Saints Day, let us give thanks for both the saints in glory and those on earth, who have led us to Jesus. As they have shared the gospel with us, may we add our voices so someone else may hear about the grace and love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”<sup>v</sup>

As we celebrate Holy Communion today, we do so remembering that in that celebration we are also in some way united with the great cloud of witnesses, the communion of saints, those who are no longer with us. We are in a mysterious way, united with those whose spirits somehow are still part of us and part of this sanctuary. We may remember David Ripley, Ruth Robinson, Stan Cushing, Jean Russo-Parks or other pastors who have spoken those words of consecration and institution at other tables of communion.

We will hear the words of Jesus who said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Bishop Devahar asks “What are the ways we can indeed remember Him by demonstrating sacramental living in our neighborhoods, nation, and world? While we may not be able to go to some of these places ourselves, certainly our prayers and dollars can make a difference!”

He invites us, “As we remember the saints in our own lives, may we pause to reflect on how they have enabled us to see and experience God,

and in that spirit, consider how we can show others that God is indeed present in their lives, wiping every tear from every eye.”

Do we believe that God has moved into our neighborhood? Do we believe that God is among us? If so, let us act like it.

Let us remember the saints in our lives and let us also believe that God calls us to be agents of change, agents of God, saints for others. God calls us to be the hands and feet of Christ in a hurting world.

Transcript:

**A Prayer Meditation for All Saints Day**

(Written by Safiyah Fosua)

We give you thanks, O God, for all the saints who ever worshiped you,  
whether in arbors or cathedrals,  
wooden churches or cement meeting houses.

We give you thanks, O God, for hands lifted in praise:  
manicured hands and hands stained with grease or soil,  
strong hands and hands gnarled with age,  
holy hands.

We thank you, God, for hardworking saints,  
whether hard-hatted or aproned,  
blue-collared or three-piece-suited.

They left their mark for you, for us, for our children to come.

Thank you for the sacrifices made by those who have gone before us.

Bless the memories of your saints.

May we learn how to walk wisely from their examples of faith, dedication, worship, and love.<sup>vi</sup>

---

<sup>i</sup> [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org) What John Wesley thought about All Saints Day

<sup>ii</sup> Scott, Lesbia in “I Sing a Song of the Saints of God”, United Methodist Hymnal #712

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iv</sup> Devadhar, Sudarshana, Together In Christ, Nov 1, 2018

<sup>v</sup> [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org)

<sup>vi</sup> [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org) “A Meditation for All Saints Day”