

What Do Saints Do? An All Saints Sunday Meditation
Offered by W. Dale Osborne
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I am always inspired, impressed and a little bit misty eyed when I observe this beautiful tree of remembrance in our sanctuary on All Saints Sunday. My eyes and my heart tell me that each one of you who brought a leaf forward prayerfully considered the one name or the multiple names to place on your leaf. Perhaps as you prayed, you remembered an image or a loving memory that you shared with the name on your leaf. If the name on your leaf was a name of someone who is resting with God in heaven, then maybe you smiled or cried as you thought about the many ways that person cared for you, taught you, challenged you or loved you. These memories are all gifts from God that keep us connected to the saints who have travelled in and out of our earthly lives.

If you are a visitor in worship today I hope upon hope that you found this opportunity for loving remembrance to be positive and spiritually uplifting for you. If you have participated in this Binkley practice for some or all of the more than 20 years we have been adorning the tree of remembrance then you, like me, have come to understand that some leaves have changed from living saints to departed saints as time has passed by. People like Alice Miller, Tom Freeman and Bob Bratcher have been both living and departed saints for me over the years. I am sure you can think of people who have been in both categories for you as well. The leaves are just as beautiful whichever category they fall in.

Our gospel lesson from Luke today has no direct or overt connections to All Saints Sunday at first glance. Simply put, Jesus is preaching to a group of people who are just beginning to glimpse his mission and ministries in Galilee. Earlier in Luke's gospel message Jesus has boldly read from the prophetic scriptures in the synagogue, healed a person on the Sabbath and challenged the authority of the ruling religious leaders. Then Jesus does something that is easily passed over. Just before our text, Jesus spends all night on the mountainside praying. He prays and he prays and he prays. I think he may have been praying for insight and courage and patience. Immediately following his night of prayer, Jesus names twelve people to be his disciples whom he also called apostles. A night of prayer and remembering helped Jesus to name 12 individuals who would be extremely important in the next three years of his ministry. A night of prayer and remembering gave Jesus the courage to expand his ministry by welcoming 12 more human beings into his bold band of musicians who played no instruments other than their heartstrings. With these 12 by his side, "Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had all come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them."

That is the setting for the strangely beautiful and perplexing message Jesus was about to teach. Luke's version of the beatitudes follows. The poor, the hungry, the disconsolate are all blessed in response to their human condition. While the rich, the fully sated and the laughing hyenas receive a message of woe. Love is lifted up for enemies and blessings are offered for those who curse you. Prayers are encouraged for anyone who hates you. This is a whole new way of greeting the new day and living your life that Jesus is offering. I, like those who heard it then, can scarcely take it in. The teaching closes with a phrase that gives us something small in verbiage but enormous in meaning to take in. The final phrase of his message reads, "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

“Do to others as you would have them do unto you”, a golden rule they say. A precept offered by religious leaders from many faiths. A way of living that holds up despite the intriguing exceptions philosophers lift up from time to time.

Earlier I stated that today’s gospel lesson has no direct or overt implications for All Saints Sunday. Now I see that I was quite wrong. Jesus spent all night praying to try and figure out who he would name as his apostles or disciples. Once he had named them and they did their best to follow his teachings, nearly every one of them were named Saints of the early church. Jesus prayed and named his saints just as many of you prayed before naming the saints on your leaves today. And what were these ancient and modern day saints encouraged to do in order to become all that God wanted them to be? What indeed do Saints do? Do they perform miracles like healing the sick or raising the dead? Perhaps this falls into their earthly actions. Do they love their enemies and take the shirt and coat from their back to keep someone warm? Oh sure, saints can do that. And what about praying all night for the people who might end up cursing you or betraying you? Do saints do that? Sure they do.

But I daresay that every last name on the tree of living and deceased saints in our sanctuary today took the time to remember and live out the lesson Jesus taught in the gospel of St. Luke today. What do saints do? They prayerfully do unto others as they would have people do unto them. Let’s all give this our best effort as we honor the saints on our tree today.

Luke 6:20-31

Then Jesus looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.

Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

"Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.

Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.