

The Communion of Saints. I am thankful for the communion of saints – those who have gone on in life before me. I am thankful for the saints of the church who make up this community the embodiment of Christ. It has been several years since All Saints Sunday, fell on Sunday. I have always celebrated it on the 1st Sunday of November because it is a day that means so much to me and to the church. 11 years ago, Halloween fell on a Saturday and the church where Josh was appointed hosted a large Fall Festival. It was look forwarded to all year long by many in the community. As the festival was winding down, tragedy struck when an older member was struck by a passing car and died. It was gut wrenching for everyone there. The next morning as we celebrated All Saints Day, I was filled with gratitude for the immediate way that we could mark his death and remember all those who have gone on before us.

This year, perhaps more than others, I have relied on the Communion of Saints. I have read and prayed prayers that other Saints throughout time have prayed. This year has been so overwhelming at times and connecting with those in history who continued to faithfully live out the calling of the church through pandemics and plagues have been a place of inspiration. But the Communion of Saints is not just those who have gone on before us, but we are also part of the Communion of Saints.

I am not perfect. I make mistakes and I know I do not claim the title of saint. I feel more comfortable with the label of sinner – I know this deep in my bones but our Epistle reading today reminds us that we are children of God. That God has claimed us as God's own. We know that God is without sin. This makes us simultaneously saints and sinners. And the community that we are a part of is here to love us and work with us as we continue to grow in the knowledge and love of God.

Our Gospel reading today is familiar. It is one that many of us remember portions of and draw comfort, particularly in grief or in times of conflict. And yet the Beatitudes as they are known are not about us individually. They are not descriptions or prescriptions as to how we are to live our life. They are pronouncements that apply to faith community – they are the marks of the church. They are signs to show those who are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungry can go to so that they may receive the blessing. These pronouncements are our prophetic call to live in the Kingdom of God which is both here and not yet fully realized.

This week I asked on Facebook – when you hear the word what comes to mind. It has been fascinating to read the responses. Some folks immediately Disneyland – Magic Kingdom, Animal Kingdom. Still others equated it to God. And

another group to empire, dominance, knights, and violence. There was an interesting mix of folks who are active in church and not and yet it pointed to how we can respond differently to a word. When we as the church speak of Kingdom – we are lifting up God’s perfect creation when every knee shall bow, and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. It is the recognition that we are all equal and cared that is filled with perfect peace and love. And it was an important reminder that we as a church have work to do.

Some thoughtful friends lifted up the difficulty we have with the word kingdom because its earthly experience has brought pain on many. We can lift the bad kings in scripture, Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh in Exodus, Herod, Manasseh and Zedekiah. We can lift bad kings in history, literature & movies – Prince John from Robin Hood, Hades, Prince Humperdinck, Denothor, Killmonger. We can also look at good examples of kings in scripture, Josiah, Hezekiah, Solomon, Jehoshaphat. We can see good kings in history, literature & movies – Richard the Lion Heart, Zeus, Princess Buttercup, Aragorn. But then there is also a long list of kings in scripture that were both – we can see David before Bathsheba was a good king and then made horrible decisions. We can see Pharaoh in the book of Genesis who brought new life for the chosen family of God and then the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph and enslaved the Israelites. We can see King Théoden

while he is under wormtail's spell and then when Gandalf frees him to rule freely. This list of kings who have a little bit of both – I think that is where most of us land.

It is the communion of saints in this place who helps us to grow. It is the communion of saints throughout the world who are faithfully living out the kingdom of God in the world. At the end of the Gospel reading Jesus says that even in our persecution we are to rejoice and be glad. I do not know about you but when I feel as if I am being persecuted, I am anything but glad. Except, Jesus is right. When the persecution comes it is because our value systems are out of step with the value systems of the age. When the world pushes back against us it is because we are showing the Kingdom of God – not as an oppressive regime but as a meek & mild, love & mercy filled community. Where everyone is loved and valued for, we are all children of God. And this is radical. This teaching upset those in power in Jesus' day – just as it does today.

This day as we remember the saints who have gone on before us, let us also remember and give thanks to the saints who join in this holy work with us. Let us be strengthened as God feeds us at the table so that we can continue to do the work of the church. The prophetic call of the beatitudes reminds us that none of us are called to do any of the work alone but within the community of

faith – within the communion of Saints. As we practice love and grace and mercy and peace, may our witness in the world be different than what is expected. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.