

Pastor Jon's All Saints Sunday sermon - November 2-3, 2019

Text: Ephesians 1:11-23 and Luke 6:20-31

An Undeserved Inheritance

Greetings to all you saints out there!

I can see some of you looking around... wondering... is he talking about me? Am I a saint? I don't feel very saintly some days. You might be thinking, aren't saints supposed to be good and do something extraordinary with their faith?

Maybe you see yourself more like the rag tag bunch who would work out at Average Joe's Gym in the movie "Dodgeball: A true underdog story." You know, the one with Ben Stiller, who plays the insecure White Goodman. He owns the state of the art Globo Gym. White wanted to swallow up Average Joe's Gym across the street run by Vince Vaughn, Peter LaFleur, who recently defaulted on his mortgage. He owed \$50,000. He needed to come up with the money in a hurry. So he got his misfits together to enter a dodgeball tournament in Las Vegas.

Well, I have good news for you. No, I won't spoil the movie. But As Lutherans, we, average joes and jills, are considered saints in the church. Luther discovered in scripture during the reformation that Christians are simultaneously saint and sinner. 100% Saint and 100% sinner. We become saints through the gift of our baptism and our faith in Jesus Christ. It is a title bestowed on us not by what we have done, but what God has done for us on the cross and in the resurrection.

If the Apostle Paul can call the Corinthian church saints in his letters, who were known to be Paul's wildest congregation, there is hope for us too.

Frederich Buechner, Presbyterian Pastor and author, describes All Saints Day like this in his book Listening to Your Life:

"On All Saints' Day, it is not just the saints of the church that we should remember in our prayers, but all the foolish ones, wise ones, the shy ones, and the overbearing ones, the broken ones and whole

ones, the despots and tosspots and crackpots of our lives who, one way or another, have been our particular fathers and mothers and saints, and whom we loved without knowing we loved them and by whom we were helped to whatever little we may have, or ever hope to have, of some kind of seedy sainthood of their own.”

I find his description of saints a little closer to my reality. None of us deserves the sainthood God bestows on us. That is where grace enters in.

In our Ephesians lesson for today, we are reminded of that grace when we hear that we have an inheritance waiting for us with all the saints who have gone before us in faith. The “last will and testament” is already made out. Because of your baptism and faith, your name is written in the book of life. And from what I can tell, you can’t earn this inheritance. The giver of the inheritance chooses to give it.

So the message I see here, is that God has already chosen us in Christ Jesus for an inheritance beyond all human measure. And when you know you are going to be taken care of, you can live more free, with less anxiety.

You see, we Christians have a death-defying faith. Jesus says to Martha in John 11 just before he raised Lazarus from the dead, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.” Therefore, we can look death in the face and say, “You have no power over me.” Christ’s victory over death and the grave is also my victory. To all the saints we named today, and the ones on our hearts and minds, they now rest in the arms of our gracious giver of eternal life. To the newly baptized, you have a life filled with hope already laid out before you.

With that in mind, we can live today without fear of what might happen today, tomorrow, or after we die. Fear seems to permeate our world on a daily basis. How can we live knowing that Jesus has our backs? And if you fear you didn’t do enough to earn this inheritance, just know that you can never do enough to earn it. It is a gift.

In our Gospel, Luke adds to the list of saints who are honored in Jesus' kingdom: the poor, the hungry, the grieving, and the persecuted because of Jesus. Do you fit into any of these categories today? Do you know others who are poor, hungry, grieving or persecuted? As followers of Jesus we are to be concerned about them too.

So what can we take from our lessons today? No matter what state you are in, if you believe in Jesus and his promises, and have been washed in the waters of baptism, you have the blessed assurance of a future with hope. No matter what challenges come your way, you have a community who will love you, and a God who will rescue you from whatever death dealing blows you might face.

So, the question then becomes, what are you going to do with your inheritance? How can you live now, knowing that it is there waiting for you? Would you change anything?

Amen!