

2020 11 01 Rev. Sara M. Holland Sermon

Scripture: Ephesians 1:11-23 & Matthew 23:1-12

Title: “Humility”

Theme: All Saints Day, Communion, Partners in Service

Intro:

A saint is a person who shows the world a bit of the divine, a bit of heaven, in their own path and life. Traditions throughout the world have saints.

Saints – people who show us something larger than ourselves. Not everyone uses the language of saint but I think almost all humans have some concept that relates to such an idea.

A person who shows a bit of the divine, people showing us something larger than ourselves.

A proverbial elephant in the room at any memorial service is the fact that no person is perfect and of course that all humans have done some wrong in their life. It is just fact. I do not mention this to downplay the wonder of the saints surrounding us but to remind us of one very real connection to the saints. We are imperfect, they were imperfect. Grace still abounds.

Saints – there are of course the well-known St. Patrick – the patron saint of Ireland. I understand that he caused a good deal of trouble by herding snakes! Speaking of a good deal of trouble there is of course our new saint of good trouble:

John Lewis; John Lewis passed this year – he was a civil rights activist and American Statesman.

Joan of Arc, the saint or patroness of soldiers in France for her fight and martyr during the 15th century.

Surely we know that each of this amazing individuals – St. Patrick, John Lewis, Joan of Arc – none of them were perfect. They gave space, though, for something divine.

And of course there are those lesser known, more for fun saints:

Casimir of Poland – the patron saint of bachelors. 😊

Lydwina – the patron saint of ice skaters. 😊 Perhaps we'll channel this saint in the winter months.

Denis – the patron saint of headaches. 😊

Apollonia – the patron saint of dentists. 😊 I let my dentist know this week when I had my cavity filled that even Apollonia was not perfect.

All saints. . . Have lived in times like the ones we see today

All saints . . . Have looked to those before them hoping to see what path they are to take.

All saints . . . Have had to determine their purpose on earth and figure out ways to let God's voice come through the unending cacophony of hopelessness in the world.

All saints . . . Have worked to figure out how to make space for Holy Spirit.

All saints . . . have looked through gratitude to discover divine truth.

All saints . . . have found riches in spiritual wealth rather than wealth of this earth.

All saints . . . have lived with humility.

Matthew 23:11 – “The greatest among you will be your servant.”

In Ephesians we hear about inheritance. We hear an expression of gratitude for the acknowledgment of saints who have come before. One of the reasons this gratitude is important is because of how hard it is to see one's divine inheritance. The 'between the lines' **struggle is that the community then and now does not always see the inheritance.** And here and now we say:

THANK GOD for the saints who have shown us a way, a path; a path that is not easy to take but is more important than we realize.

These saints have shown us we need not be perfect.

We offer up this thanks for saints knowing that gratitude is heard even from corners of angst. Though it is hard to see our inheritance, we will name this inheritance until the veil is lifted from our eyes and we see our call in this world. We are trying to trust in a world that seems to only have lies and we trying to be free in a world of oppression, hostility, anger, and turmoil. This was struggle of the Ephesians. A people stuck at the mercy of the Greco-Roman state, seeking divine truths – just like us.

THANK GOD they moved towards liberation, towards divine freedom. It was hard for them to see their inheritance, hard for them to see their call. There must have been some echoing voice in their head: “The greatest among you will be your servant.” “All who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Perhaps we have a divine inheritance to humility. A humility that will empower us and those we encounter.

Of course it can be hard for us to see our divine inheritance even though it has been shown through saints. Of course this can be hard.

We are addicted – if not to one thing then something else. . . coffee, external validation, busyness, being needed, whatever it may be.

We tend to be consuming, consuming, taking, taking . . . hardly leaving time to give.

We seek worldly power, forgetting the places that God reveals God's self.

We need these saints. We need to channel the love they showed us:

See we *have* a divine inheritance to humility. A humility that will empower us *and* those we encounter. "The greatest among you will be your servant."

Grace:

In the ancient near east, in places like Ephesus, God came to early followers in the most unexpected places. Simple gatherings making space for inheritance, for faithfulness, for peace, for love.

God has shown up where little worldly power has been. Jesus is the obvious example here.

Verse 11 from that 1st chapter of Ephesians: "In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of God who accomplishes all things according to God's counsel and will."

The next verse goes on to proclaim how this inheritance must be acknowledged for God to be glorified. Lest we forget how the divine is in each person. How might we glorify the divine in each person we encounter?

Our inheritance is one of “immeasurable greatness.”

This immeasurable greatness has been revealed to us time and again through those who have gone before us.

Immeasurable greatness coming from these places of simple humility. A divine inheritance to humility. “The greatest among you will be your servant.”

Grace

All saints . . . have seen the inheritance before them. Saints have not been perfect, but they have seen their inheritance.

All Saints have searched, discovering divine, Holy Spirit.

All Saints have climbed and been led to even higher places.

All Saints have read ancient texts and found new sacred truth.

All Saints have listened to the oldest of tunes, hearing new notes.

Saints have offered prayers that have evoked peace that passes understanding.

Saints have found unity at times of turmoil and discord.

Saints have named the divine in the hardest moments.

We honor the saints and we lay claim to what they have done. Though our own inheritance is hard to see, we name this call to truth now.

As these saints have shown humility which led to empowerment, so too may we. This week, be a person that shows a bit of the divine, Be a person that shows something larger, be someone who points to the divine.

One time when I was on a hike on the Appalachian / Appalachian Trail at the Massachusetts - Connecticut border I was with my mom a few years ago: We were headed north into Sages Ravine – an outstandingly gorgeous setting where there is a river flowing. The river has swimming holes, the forest is a mixed deciduous one – some hemlocks, ferns all around and birds calling out to their neighbors over and over. We stopped at the place where we were about to descend into the Ravine having just summited Bear Mountain. The Appalachian / App trail intersects with another one called Pleasant Trail there.

As we took a break, a backpacker came southward, ascending from the ravine, with the 20-30 pound backpack atop his relatively small body. He stopped at the trails signs to rest too and took out his map. My mom and I were trying to get our bearings.

As we rested and so did this backpacker, my mom and the young man started to chat about how long and difficult the trails were. (These are moderate to difficult, not super strenuous, but not easy.)

As my mom asked some final questions of the backpacker and he headed back to where his car was, we were trying to decide to go into the Ravine or not. As we all said goodbye to one another my mom said: “Well, thanks for chatting, you sure do look like you know what you are doing.”

And the young man replied: “I like to think we are all figuring it out,” and waved as he left us.

As he said this, my heart grew warm knowing that such humility and knowledge existed together. I felt a sense that there was something greater than our words in the short time we’d spent with him that day. This guy didn’t know it, but he seemed like a saint. He was not perfect, I know that. He gave us hope, and peace, and this is something we each can do.

People showing us something larger than ourselves.

We may not all be John Lewis but we all can create at least some good trouble. Immeasurable greatness will come from these places of simple humility if we allow it. We have a divine inheritance to humility. How will claim this inheritance this week? How will you claim your divine inheritance this week?

For Jesus said: “The greatest among you will be your servant.”

Let it be so.

12 mins 45 seconds