

2021 Oct 31 Rev. Sara M. Holland Sermon

Scripture: Psalm 146: 5-9, Mark 12: 28-34

Title: "Close By"

Theme: 23rd Sunday After Pentecost, All Saints Sunday, Wherever You Go

Introduction

There was a girl who was scared about going to school. She was on her way into Middle School and the summer was nearing its end. As the sweet yet hot days of spending time with her grandfather in his carpentry shop were growing shorter and shorter, she knew 6th grade was coming up around the bend. The girl would talk to her grandfather about becoming an apprentice instead of going to school or having him become her teacher - "it'd be like homeschooling!" She'd exclaim! "Come on, grandpa! It'll be great!"

Over the years (since the girl was about six years old), she had come to learn a lot about being in a workshop - the importance of safety. The critical steps and instructions a woodworker must follow but the complexities of leaving space for creativity. The girl's name was Michaela, she had actually been named after her grandpa, Michael. Michael was a quiet and strong guy, one who spoke with his actions. Michael allowed his name sake the space to figure a way to create her own journey in his workshop.

Though Michael always had a close eye on his granddaughter, she felt free in the space. The girl's play truly became work. Many of the grandfather's sold pieces actually had passed through the girl's hands and, really, through her creative framework.

Michaela appreciated her grandfather's smell - some sweat after a shower - see Michael was a man of routine and being a professional and naturally tidy person, each morning included a shower.

Michaela loved the saw dust - not just that smell but the way she would find it when she got back to her own home after each summer day spent with her grandpa.

She loved the food he would serve her - he was actually a vegetarian and he always seemed to have comfort food - the best grilled cheese with tomato a kid could ask for.

Perhaps better than anything else Michaela found in her grandfather's workshop were the moments of hope and peace. Sure, she'd show up some mornings to the workshop less than happy. There was one morning when her mom and her had been arguing - her little brother took her favorite tee shirt again and she had forgotten to take out the trash which meant a bit less allowance this week.

Michaela's grandfather listened carefully, while carving, to the list of problems before his namesake. As he heard he responded with a chuckle, "Well, when I was your age there was no allowance!" As Michaela glared at him, he clarified: "I'm teasing of course - that all sounds very frustrating and I'm sorry to know you are bummed today. Carve away your cares, kid." He winked.

The two sat in silence for a few minutes, simply carving.

After a bit more silence, the grandpa said, "You know, kid, there is some good stuff in there too; in life, I mean. Even on the bad days." While part of the granddaughter was frustrated with this wisdom, she knew it was true. Her heart felt lighter and heavier all at once, knowing that he was right.

The day before Michaela started Middle School, she gave her grandpa a list of the reasons she didn't want to go - no freedom, rude peers, icky lunch food, and most importantly - no grandpa. The grandfather replied, "Yeah . . ."

And as the girl inhaled the smell of the shop, he said, "You know, there is some good stuff in there too."

The next morning, as Michaela looked at her shoes as she got out of her parent's car that dropped her off, she noticed the saw dust and her heart settled. She looked at the school and she whispered to herself: "There is some good stuff in there too." *4 mins 25 seconds*

We all have the saw dust our families and faith families have given to us.

Some of us have words of wisdom, some of us have more actions than words. And some of us have deep wisdom as the result of mistakes made by those who have come before us.

As saints are remembered throughout this entire week by the global church community, we consider the ways that our faith ancestors, our friends and our family members (those who have passed) have left impressions on our lives.

We also imagine the ways that God's spirit is **close by** through the lives of the people who have passed and those who are still with us today.

In the gospel reading this morning, the last word we hear from Jesus is, "You are not far from the Kingdom of God."

Through these words we read between the lines to see the trouble of the disciples that is, indeed, often our own trouble today:

We feel far from God. *5 mins 37 seconds*

There are many reasons we might feel far from God. It is possible that we have done some wrong to a person we love, we are holding a grudge against someone, or perhaps we simply have just let ourselves become so busy that we cannot see the divine being revealed to us each day.

For the granddaughter, Michaela - the kid we heard about before - she had become overwhelmed with the sense that going to Middle School would be entirely bad - nothing good was in Middle School for her, she seemed to think - even though she hadn't even been there yet.

And so she looked to the wisdom of the workshop - the wisdom of her grandfather: "There is some good stuff in there, too."

For us, if we have done some wrong against a person in our lives, perhaps we need to look back at the wisdom of a saint who has come before us or a saint of the church or a saint who is living among us today.

Perhaps you have a passed family member who very much dwelled in a space of reconciliation. We might think of those close to us who have gone through Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous programs, those who have made amends.

We can look at the saints of the world, if we need to correct a wrong we have done. Desmond Tutu, an archbishop and human rights activist said:

“Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind eye to the wrong.” Desmond Tutu suggests here that if we seek to correct a wrong we have committed in our lives we are seeking deep truth. In such truth seeking, we might find that, indeed, God’s spirit is close by and perhaps, even, that we are moving *with* saints. *7 mins, 50 seconds*

If we are holding a grudge against someone, we might look to those in our life who move in free or liberated ways. Those who seem to forgive easily - or point to the present and future rather than dwelling in the past. In this image we might think of two kids who are arguing and then resolve their problem so quickly, moving to the next playful task on their list.

We might also think of a saint’s wisdom. Ralph Waldo Emerson said: “Finish every day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be cumbered with your old nonsense.”

With the art of moving on, we might find that God is close by, that we are moving *with* the saints. *9 mins, 1 second*

Spirit, Holy Spirit, is close by.

Theologian A.K. M. Adam notes that, “The not-far scribe may fall into the same rough category as disciples who have been given the mystery of the kingdom.”¹ Our struggles of feeling far from God are those of our faith ancestors - today, we may center ourselves around the hopeful reality that God is already but not yet present in the world. With this ‘not yet’ we find our path, our call. We must reveal this love. This truth is an invitation and a command for us - much like the first commandment we read about in Mark today. To love God, to reveal this love.

Today, this week, let us know that we are not alone as the saints surround us with strength, with hope and with Love from God. Imagine the saw dust from the saints, from the faith family, that stays with you. Know you are not alone. We may be assured - for God is *close by*. *10 mins, 10 seconds*

Please join us in hymn #306 - For All the Saints, we'll sing verses 1-4.

¹FoW, page 265