

"The Saints"

Luke 6:20-31

November 7, 2010

I read recently about a pastor who was traveling to a conference and had the opportunity to sit next to an astronomer on the plane. As they talked about their individual and very different professions the astronomer turned to the pastor and said, "Well, I'm not deeply schooled in the Bible but I fell as though it all comes down to one simple thing. My theology is 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.'" In response the pastor said, "that is certainly right out of the Bible. Let me tell you my thoughts on astronomy. It all comes down to this, doesn't it? 'Twinkle, twinkle little star. How I wonder what you are.'"

What is all of this faith stuff about? Sometimes it is easy to imagine that if we send our kids to Sunday School and push them through confirmation classes they will have it figured out At least close enough. Go to church occasionally and live a good life - do unto others as best you can That is really all a person can do. That is enough theology to shape our lives. I have had people tell me that that is what they believe to be important And frankly, I am glad when a person chooses to try to live their life by the golden rule. If you can do that you will probably be a pretty productive and respected member of society. It is good stuff. And maybe it is a good place to start. But the heavens are far more complex than 'twinkle, twinkle little star'. And life - - the life that we live and the life that God calls us into goes far deeper than the golden rule.

Across the Lutheran Church today there is a celebration of All Saints Sunday. It is deeply rooted in our tradition Yet it continues to be one of those celebrations that we do not understand. Just a few days ago I was visiting with someone who asked the question: 'who are the saints?' And that is a tough one to answer if you do not have a lot of time. I suspect that our minds turn quickly to a definition that would describe a saint as one who had lived an exemplary life - always doing the will of God. - - Within some religious traditions there are long lists of people who have been canonized because of the dedication of their lives to God. - - - As part of our tradition we will again include a prayer petition during the Prayers of Intercession which will include a reading of the names of all of those who have died in the past 12 months whose funeral services were a part of our ministry, believing that God has redeemed each of them and granted them salvation based on the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross - because of the grace of God we see all through God's eyes as saints.

Who are the saints? Who is forgiven and who is not? What does it mean to be a child of God? How will I live my life? These are important questions? These are questions that I would love to press Isabell to consider in this day of her baptism - but it may be a bit early in her language development to press to hard. But I will hold them out to her parents and sponsors and family and congregation? Isabell How will you live your life? Will you be a saint? Will you live by the golden rule? And I will ask the same questions of our 7 students who today will stand before you to make confession of faith in the rite of Confirmation /

Affirmation of Baptism. What will it mean to your life to claim faith in God? Will you live by the golden rule? Are you a saint? Will you live as a saint?

Our Gospel text this morning is really powerful. It is difficult though. I would have much preferred to leave off the opening verses that list blessings and woes. I would have liked to just start with verse 27. To look only at those last 5 verses would give all of us more than enough of a challenge for living our lives. "Love you enemies." Ok, I get that - I don't like it but I get where that would be a good thing to do [forgiveness and all of that stuff - right!]. And even though it is tough, I know to hold my tongue and not strike back immediately when someone hurts me. And I know that it is a good thing to help the poor and being generous in caring for the needs of other. I know I would want others to be willing to help me if the need arose. It is all good stuff and I suspect that if you were always able to do those things many around you would be quick to view you as a saint. But then there is that troubling opening part of the text. A text that tells us things that we just don't believe or accept even if we nod in agreement while we are in church. When we get out of these doors we believe that it is those who have financial security and have everything that they physically want and need - those who have a good life and a good time and everyone speaks high of We know that it is those people who are blessed and the others ... those who are poor and suffering or picked on well too bad for them that they messed up their lives. But God's word does the craziest thing and reverses what we believe to be true.

Who are the saint? What does it mean to be a child of God? How will you live your life? Well, confirmation class ... Katryna, Amanda, Zack, Brandon, Carley, Brock and Sierra do the best you can to live the golden rule - - - Isabell try hard ... Your life will be better for trying to do your best. Still, your best efforts will not make you a saint. Your best efforts don't make you a child of God. God makes you His child. God forgives where we fail. God reaches out to us and through God's action we can see saints emerge.

It goes so far from the simple, 'do unto others'. And when we begin to grasp the depth of the gospel of a God who loves and forgives it changes how we understand the whole world. From our perspective we could never understand how there is any blessedness in being poor or weeping or persecuted but if we can see a person standing with God, it changes everything about the situation of their life.

What will your life be like? Certainly, it is my hope that you will enjoy financial security and the things of this world. I hope that you will be healthy and happy and enjoy the respect of all around you. But there are no guarantees. It can be a rough world - people struggle and suffer and things do not go the way we always hope that they will. But standing with God is a guarantee that will never be removed. God will always love and forgive. God will always call and receive with open arms those who run to him - poor or weeping, rejected by the world or not in God we are lifted to the status of blessed saints.

There is a really interesting line by the Scarecrow from "The Wizard of Oz" who sighed and said: *"Of course I don't understand it. If your head were stuffed with straw like mine, you would probably all (only) live in the beautiful places and then Kansas would have no people at all. It is fortunate for Kansas that you have brains."* I struggled a bit to

understand what the Scarecrow was suggesting - but in a while it became clear. If we only have straw for brains we may not be able to see beyond the storms of life and the times that we fail. But we have been given real brains and we can see the rainbow and the promise and the call to walk with God. God holds the universe and us in His might hands. Walk with Him. Allow Him to make you one of the blessed saints. Remaining faithful - we will be comforted; we will be shown mercy; we will see God and be called the children of God... AMEN