

All Saints' Day
Daniel 7.1-18/ Psalm 49/ Ephesians 1.1-23/ Luke 6.17-31
St. Paul's Church, Halifax
4 November 2007

All the Saints

~Paul H. Friesen~

This past week November the first came and went, and I was left with a thought. I was thinking about our celebration of All Saint's Day today.

My thought was that I really don't want to pick a quarrel with the Roman Catholic Church, but I felt I should say out loud to my congregation that it is a lot easier to make saints than it seems.

I thought a moment about Mother Theresa. We really don't need to follow the long, complicated ecclesiastical process to declare Mother Theresa is a saint. She is quite obviously a saint, a very special saint.

But my most persistent thought was that at St. Paul's Church we would be making four new saints today, St. Luc, St. Keltie, St. Tom and St. Sam in the middle of Halifax, while shopping malls are getting ready to open. What an amazing thing in a secular age—we're making saints instead of going shopping!

That's right, we are baptizing each of these four—that is only to say we are welcoming them into the church. And the church, by the definition of the New Testament, is the company of all those baptized in the name of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The church is the community that gathers around the Lord's Table to enjoy God's invitation, the pure grace of Jesus Christ.

Some of us are young, some old; some have been growing in faith recently and some not; some are happy right now, some are not. But if we are baptized, if we confess the name of Christ in the company of our fellow saints, we are all saints.

What makes us all saints?

The Apostle Paul told the church in the ancient city of Ephesus that they were all saints, as we have heard this morning; because, he said, '[God] chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world...he destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will.'

The Apostle never got tired of telling the New Testament churches that they were all saints.¹

¹ See *Romans 1.7, I Corinthians 1.2, II Corinthians 1.1, Ephesians 1.1, Philippians 1.1*, and so on.

As an adoptive mother cradles her child in her arms after lonely years and pledges, without a thought, her love forever—as every parent gives a child the pure gift of his family name, so God makes us his children for ever, and grants us the name of Christian—and calls us a Saint.

There is nothing to be earned, no name to be deserved. This is the good news of the gospel, the good news of the pure, unearned grace of Jesus Christ.

On this promise of divine love our faith rests. As St. Paul put God's love to the Ephesians three times in this morning's reading: 'the glorious grace that [God] freely bestowed upon us...the riches of his grace that he lavished on us...the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints.'

This is what our Scriptures tell us. This is the truth. This is the gospel truth about what Jesus Christ has made us and our heavenly father declared us.

There are many things for the church to talk about around the year, many things to learn about how to live the lives of the saints in the strength of our heavenly father.

There are many things to consider about how *not to* pick family quarrels in the household of faith but instead how to live a fruitful family life, blessing the neighbours around every house of worship, instead of inflicting on them the sounds of our fights. There is much to learn and much to do.

But today we simply celebrate God's grace, we welcome new members to our family of saints, and we gather around the table to eat together. So *how can we describe* this saintly family which the saints—Luc and Keltie and Tom and Sam—join today?

First, the family of saints gathers together through good times and bad. Second, the saintly family, the Christian family lives in patient, godly hope wherever its members go.

The family of saints gathers together through good times and bad. Let's think about the book of *Daniel* for a few minutes.

That was quite a reading, quite a story wasn't it? It's enough to make sensible adults cringe. Dreams and visions come to an exile. But they're not like the dream of Jeremiah we heard a few weeks ago or the vision of Joel about bumper crops and a new covenant.

In *Daniel* we have beasts. We have a lion whose wings come off, and then begins to walk on two feet and think with a human mind. We have a bear who grows tusks in his mouth while we watch and is commanded to devour people. We have a leopard with wings and four heads who becomes a dictator. And we have a beast so ferocious it cannot be compared to anything, a beast whose horns

multiply as we watch and become dotted with human eyes that see and a human mouth that curses others.

We cringe...but kids love it, don't they? For the same reason they love Harry Potter and the heroes of Hogwarts and Narnia and other places. They haven't lost their imagination like we have.

They know a good story when they see one, and this is one.

In their imagination, in their powerless state children feel this story, our younger saints understand what's going on.

The beasts are the odds against them in their daily life: bullies, teachers, scoffers, powerful officials of many kinds—and they need someone to slay the beasts.² The saviour comes in Daniel: Ancient, with magnificent long and dazzling white hair in a chariot of fire, shooting forth rays of fire. The beasts are no match for the saviour—and we adult saints need to learn this again.

And then comes the wonderful bit, in the midst of it all, like a family dinner around the warm light of a winter supper—while a scary movie is playing. The 'Son of Man', a heavenly being sent from God, whom Christians later named as Christ, arrives to set up a just and fair kingdom.

Daniel said: 'To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion.' And then the angel says to Daniel: 'The holy ones [the Saints] shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever—for ever and ever.'

We need to remember this morning Christians who gathered around the Lord's Table in the midst of the genocide in Rwanda, Christians gathered this day to worship Christ with troops in the streets, Christians gathered now to pray in secret, for fear of arrest. And then we will know the blessedness of the picture that Daniel paints, the worship of all the saints in the midst of fear.

In fact, we don't need to push our imaginations too far to know the blessedness of fellowship right here around the table in the face of the beasts that pursue us today.

Because the beasts that pursue us all are every bit as real as the schoolyard bully, every bit as real as Daniel's monsters. They are coloured blue for depression and purple for weeping and red for anger—they are called disappointment, and unrelenting stress, and broken trust, and cancer, and the fear of death.

² With thanks to Eric Beresford who happened by while I was thinking and quoted G.K. Chesterton.

What do the saints do? The black slaves knew what to do—they worshipped their saviour, they sang the songs of Zion and they didn't stop, and their saviour came, and they were set free.

The saints thank God for what the Psalmist did: 'You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies...and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.'³

The Saints, the Christian family, gathers together through good times and bad. They gather around their Saviour together for worship—they don't stop. Because they have been made saints by none less than God, through the salvation of Jesus Christ. It is when the Saints know this and enjoy this that the monsters fall into perspective, and their own schemes and plans to save the world are caught up instead in the victory of Jesus Christ.

Second, the saintly family, the Christian family lives in patient, godly hope wherever its members go. In our story from the gospel of Luke, we are told that the crowds pressed in from every side—'a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon'.

Their needs were clear, said Luke: 'They had come to hear [Jesus] and by healed of their diseases...and all in the crowd were trying to touch him.' But in the midst of it all, Jesus turns away, the job incomplete and looks at the disciples, the first saints, and teaches them about hope.

Jesus says, 'Blessed are you who are poor...Blessed are you who hunger now...Blessed are you who weep now...Blessed are you when people hate you...Love your enemies.'

Live faithfully throughout the week, said Jesus. There is meaning in faithfulness. Don't be distracted by the sound and fury of those who hate the church or those who hate their fellow Christians or who hate their fellow Anglicans. 'Yours is the kingdom of God... you will be filled...you will laugh.' Jesus said that to get you to the kingdom is God's work, and God will work it out.

But right now, said Jesus, live faithfully hour by hour, day by day. Think about the victory of Christ and share your stories with your fellow saints. We can't solve the problems of the world, you can't sort out the ones who strike you and take the shirt off your back. That is God's work in God's time. This is the life of the saints.

Some day you might want to talk to Luc and Keltie and Tom and Sam, and remind them that you were at their baptism, when they were adopted by God.

³ Psalm 23.5-6

And you might ask them about their lives as saints, and encourage them to gather and eat with the saints.

And you also might remind them of the beatitudes, and ask them about their day to day lives, and about what they are learning about patience and faithfulness... But perhaps they will be asking us and teaching us, because the saints share, and share alike.

But right now we're going to welcome our four new saints in Baptism, and invite them to join us around the family table.