

Nov. 5, 2017
 All Saints Sunday
 Psalm 107



The Making of a Saint

Flannery O'Connor once wrote:

Saint are reminders:

*"you will know the truth
 and the truth will make you odd."*

A couple of weeks ago, on FaceBook, a message popped up prompting me to wish one of my friends happy birthday. I always try to do that: leave a happy birthday note for my friends.

But this time, the person whose birthday it was, had died almost eight years before.

Now what do I do? I wouldn't have remembered this person at this time, on his birthday, except for FaceBook. His FaceBook page keeps existing even though my friend has died.

Well knowing that this FaceBook page is public, I wished Ralph a happy birthday and wrote how much I missed him being around here in Eugene. I knew others would see my posting and add their thoughts as well. It was a way of remembering him; a faithful member of my previous church. He is now a saint. And indeed, he was messy!

FaceBook has 1.5 billion users now, and millions of them are already dead. Often when people die, their loved ones turn their profiles into memorials, a digital tombstones that family and friends can visit over and over; see the pictures; read the posts.

One statistic I read reports that if every FaceBook user who dies keeps their FaceBook page, there will be a point where those digital gravestones will outnumber the living FaceBook page owners. That point will be by the year 2098!



It's another way to be reminded that just because someone's earthly body dies, it does not mean that they are gone from our memories.. our hearts ..our DNA, our lives.

And those of us who have brought the *Saints*(of our families, our childhood, our churches), with us this morning know that they were not perfect. Though with the passage of time hopefully we can be a little more generous with their faults!



Saints *are* messy... because human beings are messy, and following Jesus makes us even messier! He says that to truly *follow* him we do counter-intuitive things like give away what we have, go to the back of the line, and love the unlovely.

In the *Apostles Creed* there is a curious sentence that reads: *we believe in the "communion of saints..."* That is an ancient belief. We are saying that we believe *all believers*, both those who are living and those who have died, are a part of us ... our church .. our belief in and following Jesus. In other words, we are in this together!

The New Testament book of *Hebrews* writes about Old Testament saints and prophets as a *great cloud of witnesses*... surrounding us. And we read that those witnesses are like *spectators* in a sports arena cheering for us as we

"run . . . the race that is set before us."

Unseen ... but here!

Many of us have seen statues of "saints" in the Roman Catholic tradition. Saints are always on the radar for them as: heroes of the faith to remember... and follow their example. They are our spiritual ancestors not with us on this earthly plane, but definitely with us on a spiritual plane.

Who are your saints?

Who are the saints of this church?

Can you see them in your mind's eye?

Can you imagine them right now encircling us?

Cheering us on?

The most amazing people I know are folks in churches I've served. It has probably been my greatest privilege to sit with a family and hear the entirety of a life to acknowledge how God works in us and in spite of us; and that in very real and tangible ways our loved ones live on ...not only in our memories but in our personalities our traditions our children.



Is it such a leap to envision them with us here today?

And in spite of the connotation of SAINT being a perfect human being that is not biblical... or practical. Even the well-known historical saints were messy! Start reading about their lives and you will see lots of outcasts and misfits; some considered unstable or oddballs by their communities. Some of these very Saints show us what it means to follow Jesus when we are tempted to play it safe, or go with the flow, or opt for acceptability over conviction and commitment and passion.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes that Saints are:

“eccentric, lopsidedly love-drunk people.”

For example:

- **St. Christiana** was a medieval woman who had a weak stomach and got nauseous at the smell of unpleasant body odors. She felt God called her to minister to underclass peasants who were dirty and smelly. Often while caring for them, she'd have to rush outside for fresh air to avoid vomiting.
- **St. Philip Neri**, claimed a ball of fire filled his mouth and made his heart get bigger on Pentecost in 1544. For the rest of his life, spiritual emotion caused him great heart palpitations. Philip became known as “God’s clown.”
- **St. Basil**, enraged the religious officials by throwing stones at the homes of rich people who ignored the poor. He would bathe the feet of prostitutes. He was called “holy fool.”
- **St. Francis** was from a wealthy merchant’s family. He chose to live a life of poverty and renounced his father’s inheritance. He gave away all of his possessions and walked barefoot, kissing lepers and caring for those in need. He would often reemerge from days of

prayer and fasting so disheveled that people would laugh and wonder about his sanity. He was known throughout Italy as *Pazzo...or "madman."*

Even Paul in Corinthians writes that (1: 4:10)

"Our dedication to Christ will make us look like fools."

Saints are real people whose life stories remind us: "It's ok that you're a little crazy" .. a little off from society's norms. They are reminders that if you follow Jesus

"you will know the truth and the truth will make you odd."

I celebratethe Saints in this church! those invisibly surrounding us this morning; but, also:

YOU...who are becoming saints!

YOU ... who are not taking the safe road.

YOU .. who are standing and fighting
for what you believe in.

YOU .. who put your body
and reputation
and financial security
on the line and in jeopardy..

YOU ... who go the extra mile
to quietly help those in need
who speak to the visitor
and the wanderer
in body and mind ..

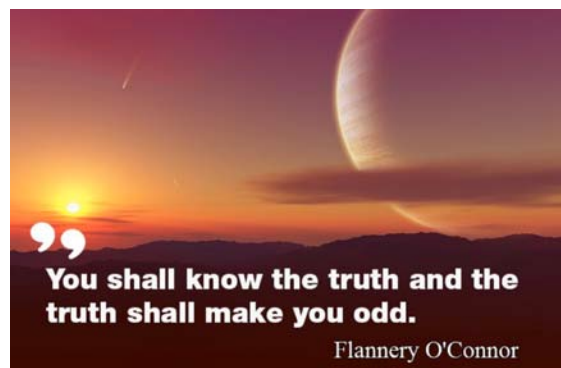
YOU .. who teach me what faith with feet looks like.

YOU .. who teach our children well.

YOU .. who are strange in this world's terms.

YOU ... who are molded and beloved by Jesus,
the strangest of them all.

Amen.



Preached by the Rev. Pamela Nelson-Munson at Eugene's First United Methodist Church.