

ALL SAINTS' SERMON

It's good to be back home. It's been a while and we're still not able to be back the way we hope to be; but we're here all the same. It's a beginning. And it's good to be here.

It's a good thing to be back home today *on All Saints' Sunday*, when the Church takes a step back to see the big picture: the communion of saints knit together in heaven and earth praising God and entering into the joy of the Lord!

And not only that; it's us too,

and it's those "we love but see no longer"

who are already on the other side.

These are the people whose names you can write on index cards and clip to our mini prayer lines, filling the pews perhaps where they once sat or bringing these people we love, into this place we love, people who may never have been here.

The church doesn't mess around when it comes to praising; everyone and everything's included,

no one's left out from before time and forever.

It's a day to give thanks, and praise the Lord.

And yes.

And precisely *now*, when the pandemic is still ravaging the earth,

when controversy and confusion fill the airwaves,

when the election is around the corner and who knows what will happen,

when fake news gets mixed up with honest reporting so that we don't know what to believe, when forest fires and rising seas warn us of environmental distress:

yes, yes , yes NOW! Why must we praise the Lord?

We praise the Lord because God is at work in the world, working through all these crises that befall us as he is bringing about a new heaven and a new earth. Therefore we trust, we hope, we pray and we're not overwhelmed,

Thanks be to God!

I know. It can be hard to believe; Bishop Desmond Tutu wrote that when things were really bad in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, he prayed that God would make God's work in the world *a little more evident!* Even in the Bible: it's the same "My God, why have you forsaken me?" "How Long, O Lord how long?"

There's a particular time in my life when I prayed that way too. It was back in the 1980s when I was here at Holy Trinity as one of the priests (there were three of us, but that was then).

At the time all was well on the surface.

But somehow...I had grown restless.

I felt overwhelmed by the way church life had become business as usual.

Had we been taken over by this secular age?

Where was the holiness?

Where was our deeper engagement with God?
The truth is I'd lost confidence in the congregation
and maybe also in myself.
So at a vestry retreat I asked God for a sign;
something to let me know where or *even if* God was present in
our lives.

Nothing happened... until toward the end,
when the Vestry members were gathering for communion.
As I stood waiting for communion myself, I suddenly had a
vision:

(this is really true!)

The vestry was all there, gathered with Jesus,
reporting on what they had been doing for him,
and He was there, really THERE
giving each one his blessing.

Utterly stunned, I came forward and received my blessing too, in
the bread and wine.

I have never forgotten that moment. It changed my life.

After that moment, I truly saw that God is at work in everyone
and that we're all kin.

That we need only to become *aware* of this as we go through
whatever the world throws at us.

Then, we can simply walk in God's love and not be afraid.

That, I believe, *is* Christian message.
We all already have the Christ-life in our hearts.

This has given me a new confidence in God and a deeper trust in
God's faithfulness and a deeper sense of the community of
saints
as I try to follow the teachings of Jesus.

And it has also given me a new way of praying that you might
call "the prayer of the heart."

But this way of seeing and being is a process,
we have to keep *renewing our awareness*,
you might say our *willingness to see this reality*.

Each day is a new beginning.

Each day we must remember; to let go of our false self and lay
hold of who we truly are.

Not always easy,
and sometimes the cost is great;
but it's the way.

I think this is what Jesus meant when he told his disciples that
they were the light of the world;
God saw not something *they* did,
but something they *were*,
their true selves; their true nature, *human* beings whom the light
shines through.

In this little communion of saints here at Holy Trinity, there have been so many who brought light into the world. I know you know them too.

They are the ones who showed us the way as they walked in it themselves.

They are the ones who know not only the good shepherd *psalm* but the *shepherd* as well..

And so precisely now,
now as the days get shorter
And the pandemic is still ravaging the earth,
NOW....with all of this swirling around us,
loves' path
becomes visible
when people,
people like you and me
let God's light shine through them.

I know that the Church of the Holy Trinity can grow in that light.

This became clear to me when we were worshiping outside,
and somehow brightening Main Street,
and the people walking by.

And some of those people hung their prayers on the clothes' lines,

joining us in our ministry of prayer.
This is what the church is all about.

And, so, listen. We can do it. We already are and can ever more clearly become that light; both individually and as the community of faith located in the middle of town.

What it requires most is prayer.

“Prayer”, the Quakers say, “is not the all, but it is *the way in to the way through.*”

It’s not some great effort we make,
although we may make great efforts.

It’s not some special talent to acquire, although we need all of
our talents.

It’s just this one simple thing:

that we learn to let go of our self absorption
and open our hearts to God so that the light can shine through.

It’s that simple, and that difficult. And we need to do it.

so...During the 4 weeks of Advent, Peter, Mary and I will be teaching this way of prayer that changed my life. This is a specific prayer practice, easy to learn, deep to do, called contemplative prayer or the prayer of the heart

It can help us learn to stay grounded in God and NOT be swept away by the swirl of current events and anxieties. Maybe it will change your life too.

We will also begin discussing Richard Rohr's book *The Universal Christ*, something we will continue in Lent. So please join us. Ask Valerie to order you a copy.

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remember:

Prayer", the Quakers say, and they knew a lot about this
"Prayer is not the all, *but it is the way in to the way through.*"
Let's go in and get through together.

It's so good to be back home; back home in the fellowship of faith, with the breaking of bread, and the prayers.
Even in these difficult days, which continue to be difficult for us all.

But Today and everyday...in the communion of saints, we know that there is a way, a way in to a way through...
and we know that we are not alone.

Amen