

All Saints Sunday
Isaiah 25:6-9
Psalm 24
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44

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November 4, 2018
Holy Spirit Lutheran Church

Grace and Peace to you all from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ - Amen.

Today we celebrate All Saints Sunday. The remembrance of those who have died and whom we have entrusted into the hands of God - as well as the saints who have gathered here for worship this morning.

As followers of Christ, we are called saints not because we will change into something different one day - but because God's relationship with us changes us here and now.

Through the waters of baptism and God's Grace, we are all welcomed into the glorious company of the saints. However, this welcome doesn't mean we are free from sin or that we need to fear losing our halo's shine over our days. Because our life as saints isn't about our perfection, as Luther likes to remind us - we will always simultaneously be sinners and saints.

So our link to sainthood isn't about what we have or haven't done in the world – or even about who we will become some day.

Our life as saints is entirely about who's we are - as beloved and cherished children of God.

While there is a long tradition in the church of venerating the life of certain Saints who have lived amazing and faithful lives – we as Lutherans typically do not spend our time praying or worshiping the saints by name. Instead, we uphold the life and the work of all the saints as an important part of the body of Christ to whom we belong.

Philip Melanthon, one of the early reformers and the author of the apology to the Augsburg Confession, said that the commemoration of the saints should be done to remember the good efforts the Saints spent their life on and how we can emulate them.

And so today, while we may not commemorate every saint in our lives by name, you will be given the chance later in the service to remember the saints in your life by lighting a candle in their name. An act that reminds us all of the great the cloud of witnesses that have come to surround us all as we gather for worship each Sunday.

Yet, we also know an important part of our celebration today is sharing about those saints who have made a difference in our lives as we have journeyed in our life of faith.

Those people who took the time to teach us from our youth that we were deeply loved by God. Those mentors who encouraged us through our teen age years. Those saints who came by our side during times of great pain, distress, or grief. And those saints we may have never known personally – but who inspire us by their very actions or name.

So this morning I thought we could spend some time doing just that - remembering, honoring, and contemplating the life of the saints in our lives.

Saints who are living or Saints who have passed on.

Saints who have changed us for the better, led us in faith, and taught us about God.

This morning I'd like to share about three important saints in my life – and after I do, I'll invite you to reflect upon the saints who have been important throughout your life.

The first saint I'd like to share with you about this morning is Saint Drogo



Saint Drogo

March 14, 1105 – April 16, 1186

If I was pressed to pick a favorite canonized Saint, Drogo would likely be it.

In the Catholic tradition, Saint Drogo is known as the Patron Saint of many seemingly unrelated causes - such as coffee houses, unattractive people, and those living with mental illness.

The first time I was introduced to Saint Drogo was when I was in university. An Anglican priest I had come to work alongside on campus decided to start up a coffee shop in the Saints name during final exams. After a quick trip to Costco and many pounds of coffee beans later – Saint Drogo's Coffee House was open for ministry out of our small office.

And let me assure you in case you are wondering – there is no greater way to support and encourage students then to give them free espresso and a listening ear as they struggle to finish their term.

So who was this Saint that came to represent coffee houses and why does his life matter to us today?

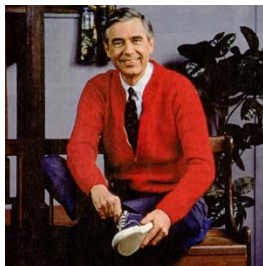
Saint Drogo was a child of Flemish nobility. His mother died when he was born – a weight and a guilt he would carry for the majority of his life. At age eighteen, he decided to rid himself of all his property and became a Pilgrim and shepherd. An act that would call him to travel by foot to Rome about nine or ten times.

During one of his last pilgrimages, he was stricken with an unsightly bodily affliction. He became so terribly deformed that he frightened the townspeople.

While he was still in his twenties, a cell was built for him to protect the local citizens of the village from his appearance. Since he was so holy, his cell was built attached to local parish. St. Drogo stayed in his cell without any human contact, except for a small window in which he received the Eucharist and obtained his food.

Yearning to serve – yet finding himself isolated – Drogo came to represent those left on our outside of our communities. Those who may just need a safe place to land and a caring conversation. So perhaps it was fitting that he was named the patron saint of Coffee Houses and the many people that society most often ignores. He became a place, saints like himself, could safely gather. To share their own questions and doubts and grief while lifting one another up in God’s name.

Blessed be the memory of St. Durgo.



Fred Rogers

March 20, 1928 - Feb 27, 2003

*“it’s a beautiful day in this neighborhood, a beautiful for a neighbor
– would you be mine? Could you be mine?”*

Accomplished Cellist Yo-Yo Ma was once asked by a reporter how he had learned to be a public figure? And unexpectedly he responded, “Mr. Rogers taught me.”

For nearly 40 years Fred Rogers was a television staple for families. Each week he welcomed many of us into his neighborhood with a smile and a song - gently teachings us the importance of curiosity, imagination, and understanding.

Wearing his trademark sweater and sneakers at the beginning of each episode Rogers, who was also an ordained minister, carefully introduced children to important concepts from cooperation to divorce, racial equality and even death.

At the time of the filming of one of Mr. Rogers most pivotal episodes in 1968 - African Americans and White Americans in many parts of the United States were still not welcome to swim in the same pools. So Mr. Rogers made a point of bringing Francois Clemmons, an African American actor and singer on to the show as the chief of police in the neighborhood. During the episode, the two of them rested their feet in a kiddie pool together to escape the heat of the day – before Fred knelt down and dried officer Clemmons feet. A lasting and inescapable image of the deep and abiding love we were to have for our neighbor.

And that was so much of who Fred Rogers was as a person and a TV character. He didn't talk about doing the right thing – he simply and elegantly did it – time and time again, offering us all a better way to be a good neighbor.

Fred Rogers was a constant reminder that kindness was something that was possible for everybody – and that by simply extending it – we could make the world a better place.

Blessed be Fred's memory



Sam "Casanova" Cavanaugh

October 3, 1992 - November 4, 2014

Lastly I would like to share about the life of a dear saint in my own life - Sam "Casanova" Cavanaugh.

I had the pleasure of meeting Sam in a coffee shop in Southern Alberta after I heard from a local community leader that there was a young Trans youth who was looking for mentorship, friendship, and support. This was during a time before Gay Straight Alliance Clubs were allowed in schools – and Sam having little to no support from his family at home – needed a safe place to land. So a few community leaders began to provide a safe and caring place for Sam to fully become himself.

Over the years Sam resiliently worked to overcome many of the barriers that had been placed before him – whether it was the bullying and abuse of his family and faith community, coming to live with substance abuse, or simply surviving the way the world refused at times to recognize his very existence – Sam never gave up his dream of living

authentically – and he did so with an honesty and a heart that was an inspiration to our wider community.

In an interview for a photo project Sam once participated in he said:

“for as long as I can remember I’ve been watching Disney and super hero movies – and in each movie there is a happy ending. Good always concurs evil and true love can overcome any curse. Throughout everything I’ve been through big and small, the one thing that has given me the confidence and courage to keep going is believing that somewhere, someday I will overcome my battles, find true love, and have my happy ending. Believing in even the possibility of a happy ending is a very powerful thing.”

Years later – during one of our last conversations – Sam excitedly told me about the new life he had begun to make in Calgary. He had a place of his own, he was building community, and as an aspiring musician he had begun singing at as many open mic nights as he could. He had found and lost love – but trusted he would find it again someday.

But tragically that day never came as he had hoped - as Sam passed away suddenly at the age of 22 – after an accidental overdose.

Sam in his life and through his death taught our small queer community the meaning of resilience and of hope. Of never giving up on realizing your worth in a world that won’t always agree you and to never give up on finding hope as well.

Sam’s passing caused a ripple of support, outreach, and care to be shared throughout the LGBTQ2SIA+ community in Southern Alberta. Youth support circles, group coffee check-ins, and even a large community memorial service provided the places and spaces Sam had always dreamed might take place. A place where people could find their happy endings – even if he had yet to find his.

Blessed be Sam’s memory.

As I have lifted up the life of these three saints this morning – I trust and know that there are hundreds of saints that have gathered and brought us all here to this very moment.

Because all of us have special people in our lives:

- Saints who have loved us into being.

- Saints that are here today.
- Some who are further away.
- And some who have gone on to rest in the great company of the saints in God's name.

So this morning I'd like you to take 30 seconds with me.

30 seconds to think of the saints who have helped you become who you are today. Those who have cared about you and wanted what was best for you in your life and journey of faith.

You can close your eyes if you would like or you can simply bow your head – I'll watch the time.

We will begin our 30 seconds of silence now.

30 seconds of silence

Thank you, Blessed be their names.

Whom ever you have been thinking about – how pleased they must be to know the difference you feel they have made in your life and world.

In a moment – if you feel comfortable – I'd like to invite you to turn to a neighbors or two and share briefly about one of the saints you are carrying in your heart today. If you don't feel comfortable sharing that is okay, feel free to listen and hold space for another story about an important saint.

I'll give you a few minutes each to share.

Sharing time

I'd like to close this time of sharing and thanks giving with a prayer:

God we give you thanks for the lives and the light of your saints.
From every time and place – you gather us in your mercy and grace.
Calling us your children again and again.
Help us to hold your beloved saint as an example to enliven our faith,
Strengthen us in your love, and uphold us in your spirit.
Blessed be their holy memory. Amen.