

Grace and peace to you all from God – the one who calls us beloved in this life and the next – Amen.

We often have two ways of thinking about the saints as a church. We think of the Saints with a capital “S” – like Saint Peter or Saint Mary – as the named heroes of our faith, those who made their mark on the world and left a legacy of devotion that inspire many today.

And then we think of the saints with a lowercase “s,” those regular everyday people with gifts and abilities that have made our world a better place for their leadership and care – individuals like Nelson Mandela or Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

Yet whether we’re talking about upper-case or lower-case saints, we tend to think of them as exceptional. Their sainthood might feel pretty inaccessible to us regular folks who routinely lock our keys in our cars or shout at the television during the fourth quarter of a Raptors game.

Many of us “regular, everyday” Christians don’t feel like we can live up to the lives of the Saints who died bravely facing lions in the coliseum – never mind our own saintly neighbors who shovel our snow before we can get to it.

But the original use of the term “saint,” particularly by Paul, was meant to indicate all the faithful gathered to worship God. So today is not just about heroes of the faith, and it’s not even just about our own beloved departed who have gone before us. It’s not “Some Saints Day.” This is “All Saints Day.”

Our job today is to take away some of the holy awe we place around saints and ask ourselves: If we are all saints, what does that mean? What should we do? And how should we live?

The great saints of the church, the heroes of the faith who gave their lives for the gospel, were in fact folk just like us. And if we think about it, we probably already knew that from our Sunday school lessons.

Poor Saint Peter certainly put his foot in it more than once, up to the point of denying and abandoning Jesus at his death. Saint Paul spent most of his adult life hunting down Christians for even saying Christ’s name before becoming one himself, and Saint Mary Magdalene was the talk of the town for all the wrong reasons – yet Jesus entrusted her part of his resurrected ministry to carry forward.

We know that the saints in every age were everyday human beings just like us, and we can be sure they made the same mistakes and carried the same doubts we have throughout our life of faith. Yet something within them led them to do great things with and for God – to live and sometimes even die with incredible courage and boldness in the face of great conflict and even fear.

Which leaves me to wonder - how did they do that?

What I have found is that the saints we often speak of had an unshakeable commitment to follow Jesus, no matter where that took them. And we have an incredibly vivid story of where following Jesus might take us in the gospel lesson from Luke today. And as we discover what this text might hold for us, I am thankful for the commentary of Rev. Whitney Rice for sharing her lens. She writes:

“The very first sentence we read from the gospel today says: Jesus looked up at his disciples.

But in order for Jesus to look *up* at his disciples, he had to be at a level below them. So, take your mental picture from old Sunday School illustrations of Jesus standing up on a rock above a crowd of people to preach to them, and stand it on its head. Jesus was down on the ground as he taught one of his most central messages.

Picture being a disciple standing around in a circle as Jesus gently and carefully lays hands on someone in deep need, the entire laser focus of his love trained on this beloved child of God, ready to pour out his grace. And he *looks up* at his disciples and says, *“Blessed are you who are poor. Blessed are you who are hungry, who weep, who are excluded and reviled and persecuted. You are blessed, and you are beloved, and you are mine.”*

Many of us hearing this gospel today are likely not literally poor and hungry. But those of us blessed with economic riches and societal privileges are often desperately poverty-stricken in other ways. We are starving for meaning in our lives. We weep silent inward tears of loneliness and depression. We hunger for community without realizing it. We thirst for our own lost hope in a world driven by doubt.

But we need not fear looking down into the depths of suffering, both inward and outward. Whether the abyss we run from is the hungry and oppressed around the world and in our neighborhoods, or the undiscovered pain within our own hearts, when we

look down into those places, we find Jesus looking back up at us. And where he is, we need never fear to go.”

That is what the great saints, the heroes of the faith, knew. They saw Jesus look up at them and call them blessed, and so they followed him down into the depths of their life and ministry as saints of God. And there, they found healing, and joy, and communion with one another and the creator of all in the least likely of places and situations.

So perhaps the best way to mark All Saints and uplift our Confirmands as they Affirm their Baptisms today is to remember and repeat the truth of these revelations over and over and over again until we know them within the depths of our being.

That we are all beloved saints of God – far from perfection but treasured just the same.

That God’s all-encompassing grace will always act to meet us – even in the depths of our or our world’s greatest pains.

And that nothing, not even death itself will ever be able to keep us from God’s loving embrace.

That is the gift we uphold for you today, Chris, Noah, and Rowan - as you prepare to Affirm your Baptisms as saints among us at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church.

It is a reminder for each one of you, and all of us gathered here, that the good work God began in us, is still at work today: calling us through the Spirit to remember we are all beloved children of God. Having been sealed by the Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ - we are sent out into the world, freed to journey in faith, just as the flawed and faithful saints of God have long before us.

As hands are laid upon our confirmands and prayers are shared today – may you know that God, and this whole family of faith rejoices with you as you continue to journey as saints at Holy Spirit. And we pray that whenever you look up or look down, you would see Jesus right there with you, sharing the way.

And may this be so among us - Amen.