

**The Saints We Know  
Mark 12:8-34**

**Don Flowers, Jr  
All Saints Day, 2021  
Port Williams United Baptist Church**

I pray that the old Scottish litany might be fulfilled in your life tonight—*“From ghoulies and ghosties, and long-leggedie beasties, and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord, deliver us.”*

I don't know what ghoulies and ghosties and long-legged beasties will come to your house last night, I don't even know if any might show up at our house! Hopefully we will be able to ward them off with a donation of a candy bar or two, or three!

Halloween is one of those wonderful children's holidays. I remember walking the streets with Alison and Savannah when they were little, hoping that maybe, just maybe they would tire out before I dropped over. Seldom did that happen! They loved going trick-or-treating, and if the truth be told, I loved it too. Not only was that wonderful time with my daughters, it was also wonderful times with our neighbors. It was one of those nights when the entire neighborhood would come out in mass. You would run into people that you hadn't seen in a year, and have conversations that wouldn't be repeated for another year as we “borrowed” a Snickers from the children's bag when they weren't looking.

But now it is not just a day for Children! More and more Halloween is becoming an adult holiday—and by that I mean an adult holiday! I was in Memphis last week and was really amazed to see the ads for the parties being held at various nightclubs. A prize for the most “scary, scandalous or sexy” costume promoted one ad—with suggestions for each! A long way from the homemade spider costume that I once had! (Which was the greatest costume I ever had, I might add—long legs made out of pipe cleaners!) But maybe not very far from the way this festival first began.

Halloween can be traced back to the Celtic festival of Samhain (pronounced sow-in). The Celts, who lived 2,000 years ago in the area that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom, and northern France, celebrated their new year on November 1. This day marked the end of summer and the harvest and the beginning of the dark, cold winter, a time of year that was often associated with human death. Celts believed that on the night before the New Year the boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead became blurred. On the night of October 31 it was believed that the ghosts of the dead returned to earth. In addition to causing trouble and damaging crops, Celts thought that the presence of the otherworldly spirits made it easier for the Druids, or Celtic priests, to make predictions about the future. For a people entirely dependent on the unpredictable natural world, these prophecies were an important source of comfort and direction during the long, dark winter.

To commemorate the event, Druids built huge sacred bonfires, where the people gathered to burn crops and animals as sacrifices to the various gods. They would wear costumes, typically consisting of animal heads and skins, and attempted to tell each other's

fortunes. When the celebration was over, they re-lit their hearth fires, which they had extinguished earlier that evening, from the sacred bonfire to help protect them during the coming winter.

As Christianity expanded into Celtic lands, Pope Boniface IV designated November 1 All Saints' Day, a time to honor saints and martyrs. Many believe he was attempting to baptize the festival of the dead with a related, but church-sanctioned holiday. The celebration was also called All-hallows or All-hallowmas (from Middle English Alhallowmesse meaning All Saints' Day) and the night before it, the night of Samhain, began to be called All-hallows Eve and, eventually, Halloween.<sup>1</sup> Truth be told, it really wasn't the major event!

But as the years have gone by, it seems that the ancient festival is taking over. Seldom do we celebrate All Saint's Day. In fact, if we are honest, we rarely think about saints. Oh, there are some that we remember—St. Nicholas, St. Valentine—for obvious reasons; St. Christopher—because he has a really cool necklace; St. Joseph when we are trying to sell a house—but other than that???

We rarely think about the saints, but those who haunt our world? Those are the ones that we dwell on, that the media feasts on day after day, week after week. We learned this week about the sexual abuse committed against Kyle Beach when he was with the Chicago Blackhawks. Apparently they were too busy chasing the Stanley Cup to be bothered by his accusations! We continue to hear of other athletes who are refusing to get vaccinations, believing they are too important to their team to be set down.

We know their stories, but how often do we hear about the times that an athlete takes the time to donate their fame, and often their fortune, to something good. We see athlete visit hospitals, but what about the foundations they operate to help educate, improve the lives of others? Not quite as spicy!

If we only had a looney for every political scandal we hear then we would pave the parking lot and have funds in reserve! It is not uncommon for us to hear about the impropriety of public officials when they are caught in a scandal involving someone other than their spouse—but how often do we hear about a public official celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary; or making sure they are home for a family event, or just being family? Somehow we don't hear about that, we don't think about it, oh, if truth be told we really don't want to hear it! We have become so jaded that we only seek out the worst. We prefer Halloween to All Saints Day.

And that is a loss for us all! We need saints! We need their stories, their inspiration, their prayers. Growing up Baptist I always secretly envied my Catholic friend who had all those patron saints—those who could intervene on his behalf. From time to time I like to take a look at the list of patron saints—just in case!

For instance, choir members, St. Dominic is there, and here for you; Doctors, St. Luke is your guy (rather obvious don't you think???) Those who fancy dogs, you have your saint

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.history.com/content/halloween/real-story-of-halloween>

in St. Roque, but if you get bitten by a dog then turn to St. Hubert. If you are going fishing, you have your choice between St. Peter and St. Andrew. Choose wisely, because they are busy. St. Peter also covers foot trouble, while Beyonce and all the single ladies are watched over by St. Andrew. (Personally I think Andrew got the better gig!) St. Dorothy and St. Sebastian are there for gardeners—it takes a lot of work to get a garden to grow; ironically St. Francis is there for merchants.

And perhaps that is what made this day so important in the church. It is good to know that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, those men and women who have gone on before, and even now intercede on our behalf. It is almost like having a celestial saintly cheering section.

But is that all a saint is? And perhaps more importantly, what is a saint? The scripture says that all who follow Christ are being sanctified, being made into saints—some more effectively than others. The scripture refers to all the saints, meaning you and me, but that really isn't what we mean. No, when we are talking saints we are usually talking about individuals like St. Francis, Mother Teresa—men and women who went far beyond what any of us can imagine doing.

But is that what a saint is? In pondering saints this week, I tried to think what makes a saint different than a person who just does a lot of good stuff. We all know people who do good things for others, who are making a difference in the world. But are they saints? On the other hand, I also can recall individuals of great faith who really don't meet the threshold of sainthood. So what is a saint?

It seems to me that saints are those individuals whose actions are rooted in deep spirituality. What they do comes from the depths of their faith, of their connection to God. And what they do only deepens that commitment.

We see that in Mother Teresa, a woman who in spite of deep doubts heard the call of God to tend to the sick and dying of Calcutta, and in each person she helped, saw the face of God. We see that in Clarence Jordan, whose faith called him to the disenfranchised of Georgia, to those of different races years before it was even legal—a move that came from his reading of the Sermon on the Mount, and his time at Koinonia only deepened his resolve to follow Christ.

Those are the saints we know. But what about the saints that we **know**? On this All Saints Day it is important for us to remember those saints in our world, but if we fail to remember those saints in our lives, then we have missed the boat! They aren't perfect people—Martin Luther reminded us that we are simultaneously saints and sinners, but my guess is that each of us have known people who have lived out a depth of faith that we find extraordinary. Who are they?

Who are those saints that have touched your life, who have inspired you to a deeper faith; who have made you want to bless the God they follow, whose love and witness has awakened something deep within you?

Who are they? Can you see their face?

It might be a teacher who every day when you went into her class you knew that you were loved and respected, who opened up a world to you that you never knew existed—a

world where anything was possible; and she showed you the face of God while never mentioning God. But you knew.

It might be a parent or grandparent who taught you the stories, but even more took you to do your faith—at a homeless shelter, in another city, in your own home.

It might be a friend who has been willing to listen to you when your heart was breaking, when you needed somewhere to turn.

You see, saints come in all shapes and sizes! As I think about the saints I have known, I recall a retired Navy captain who spent time teaching teenagers how to repair homes out of the back of his van. I recall a woman who opened her home to children of all nationalities, who cooked for them and corrected them, and loved them. I think of individuals who literally put their livelihood on the line following their convictions. I think of people who lived out their sainthood through vegetable soup, and casseroles, and peach cobbler. I think of people in small towns in North Carolina, individuals that I have had the privilege of meeting in other countries. I think of people in this place.

Over the past few weeks we have been considering what matters. Today I want to suggest that saints matter. Those men and women who have been God's holy flirtation with your world, with you; those people who have shown you the face of God.

Who are the saints in your life? On this All Saints Day, let me encourage you to give them some thought. Take the time to thank God for the impact they have made on your life—some may be people that have long passed from this life; others you may never have met personally, but their influence has touched your soul. Thank God for them.

But don't forget those who have touched your life, who have held your hand. They may never make a list of patron saints, but there may never be a more important person in your life. Give thanks to God for them this day. You might even want to tell them thanks yourself. It might be the best treat they get this weekend!