

Saints All Around
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"Saints All Around" Pilgrim Church UCC, All Saints Day, (Revelation 21:1-6a) November 1, 2015

All Saints Day

-Began because there were so many saints and martyrs that the Church ran out of days in the calendar. November 1 commemorates all the saints who don't have their own unique date.

-Protestants put our own spin on this practice with our belief in the priesthood of all believers so we focus on those people we've known and loved, combining All Saints Day with All Souls Day.

-On All Saints Day we remember Paul's words that there are a great cloud of witnesses who remain a part of the Church and a part of our lives even if they're no longer with us.

-Take a moment to think of the saints of Pilgrim Church and the names that surround us in our sacred space.

-Open up your hymnals and see who gave that hymnal to our church. Look at the end of the pew and see whose names enabled us to be in this beautiful sanctuary. Go out to the Memorial Garden after worship and remember those who came before us. See the plaques for Moderators and Pastors who've served Pilgrim over the years up front. We're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses when we worship at Pilgrim Church! And can we also see that there are saints among us?

Who are these Saints?

-Saints are people just like us. Paul begins his Letter to the Ephesians: "To the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Jesus Christ." Paul calls living members of the Christian community in Ephesus saints!

-Nadia Bolz-Weber writes in *Accidental Saints*, "It has been my experience that what makes us the saints of God is not our ability to be saintly but rather God's ability to work through sinners . . . I have come to realize that all the saints I've known have been accidental ones—people who inadvertently stumbled into redemption like they were looking for something else at the time."^[1]

-On All Saints Day we remember and name those we've lost and we celebrate the living saints in our lives.

-Have you ever thought: Oh that person is such a saint!? What do we mean by that?

-Patience, humility, dealing with adversity, being grateful for the gift of life, compassion?

-In the lives of saints we see what a good life looks like, how to be grateful when we don't have everything we want, how to be courageous when all feels lost, how to love people through heartache and pain.

-NBW was once asked to speak at her denomination's National Youth Gathering (35,000 people) and she said no. The organizers persisted: we want the kids to see a different image of what a Lutheran looks like with a strong message of grace. She said yes. Felt dread on the plane and ended up speaking to a teenage girl who was clearly hurting. When they spoke, the girl opened up about her life and NBW remembered what it was like to be a teenager who just doesn't fit because she *still* doesn't fit. God has to be embarrassingly obtuse with her at times, as if the girl said: "Oh hey, God told me to tell you something: Get over yourself." [2]

Saints All Around

-What strikes me is that there are saints all around us: the great cloud of witnesses who've gone before us, people who are saints among us, and people who may be accidental saints in our lives.

-When we hear God declaring in Revelation that God's home is among mortals it means that God is with us. God's presence is here. And God uses us to enact God's realm of love on earth.

-God is making all things new. We can live transformed lives because God can work through anybody.

-So we can be grateful for those saints who are no longer here (that great cloud of witnesses), we can be grateful for the living saints we love, and we can be grateful that God is always using people to be accidental saints in our lives.

-This week let's think about our saints here and now. Let's thank them for shining their lights when we need help to get out of the shadows. And thanks be to God that there really are saints all around! Amen.

[1] Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints: Finding God in all the Wrong People*, 7.

[2] *Ibid*, 37.