

November 1 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 24

Deuteronomy 6:1-9

Mark 12:28-34, p. 926

Sermon *Saints: Warts and All*

Try some of these on for size: It has been said that a saint is a sinner who never got caught or a saint is a the person with a keen, keen religious insight because of all experiences he/or she has had in being a sinner; or a saint is a dead sinner who has been edited by the relatives. Have you ever thought of that when you go to a funeral service? Or a saint is a person who is particularly hard to get along with. Happy is the pastor in whose congregation in which there are not very many saints. All humor aside, the truth of the matter is that many of us tend to get just a little nervous, just a little bit confused when the religious conversations turns to the subject of saints or saint hood. On the one hand we associate saint with those persons long since dead who have been canonized by the church and now carries that title of saint like St. Thomas or St. Peter. On the other hand, we use the word saint to refer to a Christian brother or sister living or dead whose life is or was exemplary in some way. And is a model in fact for us to follow in the way we live our Christian life. Yet in a finite description of someone of someone's life or person, we often ignore real human failings, the real human short comings which are also present in that same person's life and being aware of those shortcomings we get a little bit cynical about that person when we hear that person referred to as a saint (because we know differently—don't we) So who or what is a saint?

Well St. Paul, Martin Luther, and Jesus-what a trinity those are-can give us some important clues. First St. Paul- Paul gives us a little bit of a back handed clue about what saints are. Paul begins his first letter to the Christians in Corinth by addressing to those in whom he is writing as saints and then Paul spends almost the entire letter nailing those same saints to the wall for what he would consider their questionable behavior.

After Paul come Martin Luther who based his thoughts on his study of the Scripture, and Paul's writings in particular to define a saint as the result of a person who is a redeemed sinner. Not someone who has faultless character who never makes a mistake, not someone with perfect piety and a blemish-free record and not someone with immaculate record in social behavior or inter personal relationships, a saint rather is a person who has all the things that I spoke of before the pock marks, the warts, the scars, the faults, the mistakes, the questionable motives and the sins which can be a part of any human life but who with all those

failings, but who with all his shortcomings reaches out in faith and grabs hold of the forgiveness that God offers to each one of us through the love of Jesus. In short we are all sinners yet in Jesus we are, also all saints. But not because of anything that we have or have not done as I mentioned before, we are saints because of what God has done for each one of us. When we claim that title saints, we are not saying “Hey look at what a great person I am. But we are saying rather look at how good God is and look at what God has done for me as a poor sinner. In spite of our sin in fact as Luther and Paul put it and at the same time we are sinners, God, also makes us saints.

All Saints Sunday is not only a day to remember the lives of all those faithful Christians who have gone on before us and now rest in death. It is not only a day when we thank God for their lives but also for their love and their example. Not only a day to thank God for covering those warts, and blemishes, sins and failures with God’s forgiveness, just as God covers all those things in each one of us as well. All Saints is also a day, I think, to feel good about ourselves, to celebrate the status that we have in life and in the life which we have through Jesus. We are of infinite value in God’s eyes. We are priceless treasures. We are God’s saints because for us God became one of us and suffered death and rose again. Not only for us individually but for all of us because we are all saints. Before Luther or St. Paul ever wrote, Jesus brought this good news into the world. Through Jesus we are given sainthood and we are called God’s saints. To guide our efforts in doing that we conspicuous examples of those names we are going to share living and dead known to us and known to us alone to whom we love and adoration we apply that title saint.

But more importantly we also have Jesus’ teachings which describes for us, what saints are like. In Mark 12 Jesus describes those two great commandments. The first, “O hear Israel, our Lord our God is one. Love God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength and the second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” You know the Jewish people of Jesus’ day took quite literally the command in Deuteronomy 6 which Scott read for us, to wear the great commandment on their hand and on their eyes and on their door posts They had little boxes that called Phylacteries which they strapped the commandments to love God to their heads and to their wrists and containers called Mezuzahs in which fixed the great commandments to the very door posts of their homes.

Of course on this All Saints Day God does not require any of us to do this in order to qualify us for sainthood. As we have said before this passage teaches us, All Saints Day is not a day to look at how good I am but instead a day to look at how good God is and what he has done for each one of us. So the question that we have to ask ourselves this day is not, “Am I perfect enough to be a saint? Do I have

a big enough halo to be a saint? I know a couple of you do- however for some of you the halo is down around your ears this morning. Instead we need to be asking ourselves the same question that those Jewish people asked themselves in Jesus' day, by putting those boxes on their wrists and on their heads and on their doorposts and the question is this; when we look at who we are and what we do and where we live, do people see a person, see a family, do they see a home that reflects, a belief in a God who is pure love. I will ask that question again, when people look at who I am, and what I do, where I live, do people see a person, and do they see a family, a home which reflects belief in a God who is pure love. If we can say yes to this question then I think we have found the key to being a saint. Because it is this kind of simple love, in this kind of simple devotion to God that true sainthood can be found. And together we say AMEN.