

The Feast of All Saints
November 5, 2017
Baptism of Jonathan Ernest Angle
Revelation 7:9-17
The Rev. Carenda Baker

A single dad, who was new to the community where he had just moved to live, decided to take his seven year old son to church one day. It was a church they had never been to before. Dad did not know where the Sunday school classes were held, or anything else about the church's programs, so his son sat with him for the worship service.

The preacher began his sermon about the saints. He talked about the history of the church, and people like Peter, James and John and Mary and Martha – people who Jesus knew personally.

He talked about the early, fledgling church: people like Ireneaus, Tertullian, and Augustine – “church fathers” he called them – people who helped clarify the faith amidst confusion and controversy; people who laid the foundation of the church.

He spoke of people who lived over a thousand years later – people like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Teresa of Avila who challenge us to look at the faith differently and find a deeper relationship with God.

He described modern day saints like Mohatma Gandhi, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dorothy Day who all struggled for the rights, well-being, and dignity of all people.

While the preacher went on about all this, the little boy was fascinated by the stained-glass windows that lined the inside of the church. It was a very bright sunny day, so he was overcome by the colors. It was as if a rainbow had shattered and covered the congregation with radiant shapes of red, green, gold, blue and purple. The colors that were reflected by the people in the windows – some of the same people the preacher mentioned in his sermon. The colors were so beautiful and they filled the church.

After the service, when they were driving home, the father asked his son what he thought of the worship service. “I liked it”, he said.

“Were you listening to the minister's sermon at all?” inquired the father.

“A little,” the boy admitted.

“Do you know what he was talking about?” the father asked. The boy said the sermon had something to do with people called saints. Wanting to see how attentive his son had been, the father then asked, “And who are the saints?”

The boy said, “*They are the people who the light shines through.*”

The New Testament calls all Christian believers saints. Saints are not just those who have done dramatic things in history: defending the faith against heresy and false teaching, dying as martyrs because of their belief in Christ, fighting for the rights of all people. Saints are those who have helped us open our eyes to see God in our midst when we were blinded by other loyalties or stale and self-centered ways of thinking.

By virtue of our baptism and our walk with Jesus, we – saints, all of us – have been sent by God to make a difference, to make this world a bit better by being proactive in showing kindness, goodness, and love, and daily turning to and leaning upon God. Some saints have been officially designated by the Church as holy people and worthy of honor. But most saints are not designated in this way. Most saints are not represented in statues in cathedrals or stained glass windows in churches. Sainthood is more ordinary and dirty than that. It is present every day, in the nitty-gritty of life. Sainthood is going into this volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, and troubled world and making it a bit brighter by letting God’s let shine through us. We let the light shine through in our words and deeds, by simply following God’s call and being open and empty enough to let the radical, affirming and liberating message of Christ’s life and love guide us and flow through us.

Now especially for you Amy and Matt, as you bring Jonathan to receive the sacrament of holy baptism today, I offer you this gift from several of the saints here at Trinity Church.

On Wednesday during our noon healing Eucharist service, we read the same Scriptures as we have heard this morning, as Wednesday was Nov. 1st, the designated observance of the Feast of All Saints. We talked about the reading from Revelation and the challenge it was and is to be faithful, to persevere in times of struggle and doubt, to go through the “great ordeals” we face in life. The writer of the Revelation to John wrote in symbolic language. The gist of his message is – Take heart! Keep the faith! God wins and the powers of evil and death lose. At the end of time, God will make all things new. I asked the saints who were present what wisdom they would offer you today as young parents bringing a child to be baptized into Christ and Christ’s Body, the church. All of these saints are parents themselves. Here are a few things they said.

1. **SUFFERING IS A GIVEN FOR YOU, AND YOUR CHILD.** It's just part of life and it is part of loving. So expect it. Yes it's painful and it hurts, but you do not need to be overwhelmed by it.
2. **BECAUSE - - YOU ARE NOT IN THIS TASK OF PARENTING YOUR CHILD ALONE.** You are part of a community of faith. You can find support, strength, wisdom and companionship here. You can be part of hearing and sharing stories of hope and resilience and God's grace.
3. **REMEMBER TO DO THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS FOR AND WITH YOUR CHILDREN.** Pray for them. Say to them regularly, "I love you." Give them your blessing at the end of the day. They might have messed up royally, disappointed you, and created an endless source of frustration that day. Bless them anyway. They are precious gifts from God. And we are responsible for them. We are stewards in helping shape who they will become, who God intends for them to be.
4. **BELIEVE THAT PRAYER MATTERS.** One of the Trinity saints told a story of praying for her child and the miraculous way God provided direction for the child - from a complete stranger! Trust that God answers your prayers, whether or not you see or understand the answers. And yes, sometimes the answers will come in most unusual and unexpected ways.
5. **DEVELOP AND STICK WITH YOUR OWN DAILY PRACTICE OF PRAYER.** Consistency in developing your prayer life will strengthen you over time. It will strengthen your relationship with God, your resilience, and ability to trust God, no matter the circumstances you and your children face.
6. Reflecting on that image of the Lamb who sits on the throne in the passage from Revelation, chapter 7 – *Remember the Lamb is God, who so tenderly cares for us, and will guide and comfort us, and never leave us alone.*

Today Jonathan will be sealed in baptism to go through all the seasons of life with and in Christ. He will be made a new saint today. He will be made one of those, one of us, the community of the faithful through whom the light of God shines.

In word, water, oil, bread and wine – today we remember God's work and the saints who have gone before us. We rejoice that the good news of God in Christ will not be left without witnesses as another today is added to the company of heaven, with whom we offer our praise and adoration. We raise our voices in the company of all

faithful people, connected through our baptism to those Christians who have died, those saints who are alive now and worship with us here today, and those yet to be born.

WORD. WATER. OIL. BREAD. AND WINE.

These are the sign-acts that remind us God is faithful and constant – as we remember God’s faithfulness. As we hold out our hands in this present moment we receive love unconditionally given. And we are empowered and clothed with hope planted in our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit.

For your comfort, strength, and hope, hear these words of Robert Lowry’s contemporary hymn “*How Can I Keep from Singing?*”

“My life goes on in endless song
Above earth’s lamentation
I hear the real, though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.
Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear the music ringing,
It sounds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?
No storm can shake my inmost calm,
While to that rock I’m clinging.
Since love is Lord of heaven and earth
How can I keep from singing?”

How indeed, saints of God? “*Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.*” And AMEN.