

2022 10 30 – Sainly Living

Scripture: Luke 6:20-31 (The Inclusive Bible)

This weekend we are celebrating Hallowe'en, a day when costumes and candy and ghostly apparitions abound! But in our secular celebration we often forget that Halloween is actually a shortened version of All Hallows' Eve, the night before All Hallows' or All Saints' Day. All Saints' Day (November 1st) was originally established by Pope Gregory III to honour all the saints of the Roman Catholic Church. But this tradition has grown and shifted and now we also have All Souls' Day on November 2nd. This triad of days is seen by many as an opportunity to remember and to celebrate all who have died. So today, later in this service, we will be remembering those who have died over the past twelve months from our own congregation.

But for now I'd like to focus on saints. And I want to start by naming a few. I'm not just talking about saints that have been canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. I'm wondering if we can identify some historic or living people that we think deserve the designation of "saint." There are no right or wrong answers. Let's just throw a few names out. People that we believe deserve to be called a saint (Robin Wall Kimmerer, Matthew Fox, Martin Luther King Jr, Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela etc). Are these people perfect? No! Have they ever made mistakes? Absolutely! So what are some of characteristics that these people have in common? What is it that makes them a saint (courage, honesty, compassion, love, striving for justice)?

This week I downloaded a book from the [Internet](#) a book called “Holy Troublemakers, Unconventional Saints” by Daneen Akers. This book was published in 2019 and contains the stories of thirty-six people from around the world. There are some names that you may recognize such as Florence Nightingale, Francis of Assisi, Mister Rogers, Thich Nhat Hahn and Harriet Tubman; but there are many others that are not as well known. They are people from all walks of life and many different religions. What all these saints and troublemakers have in common is their deep compassion, their desire for justice and their courage in the face of difficulty.

One story I enjoyed was that of Anne Hutchinson. Here’s a quote from her biography:

In the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637, Anne’s spiritual leadership in the community was unacceptable to the men in charge. First, Anne was a woman, and the powerful men who ran the church and the colony did not believe that a woman could teach anyone about God. But, most alarming to them was that Anne was popular. She’d started a weekly gathering in her home for women to talk, pray, and discuss that week’s sermon. Anne, a gifted teacher and speaker, shared her thoughts with the women, and they found her convincing. Soon, they brought their husbands, too. Before long, Anne was preaching to 80 people a week in her home.

The story goes on to say that Anne even questioned some of the ways that the male preachers were interpreting the scripture. She and her family were

eventually banished from their colony because she, a woman, had the audacity to preach and teach Jesus' gospel of love.

As we know, Jesus also pushed boundaries when he preached and today's scripture reading is no exception. This reading has been specifically chosen for All Saint's Day. And I believe that in this passage we will find some important clues about it takes to live as a "saint," and, in particular, what living looks like for unconventional or troublemaking saints.

First of all it's pretty obvious that saintly living isn't not going to be easy. Jesus says that it is the poor, the hungry, the weeping and the scorned are the ones who are blest. And then he tells his disciples to "Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you." Yikes! Those are not easy instructions. But being hated, cursed and mistreated does sound a lot like what happens to people who question the status quo, people like Anne Hutchinson, Nelson Mandela or Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

"When they slap you on the cheek, turn and give them the other; when they take your coat, let them have your shirt as well." Sometimes these instructions can be taken too far, so it is important to note that Jesus is not telling his disciples, or us, to let people walk all over us. He is not condoning abuse of any kind and Jesus is not suggesting that we should allow injustice to continue without being challenged. In fact, what he is saying is that we can and should fight injustice but not with hate or violence. Jesus is saying that we can change the world with kindness, prayer, and love.

This is what saints do, ordinary, everyday unconventional, troublemaking saints. They work to make a difference in the world and they do it with love. Mahatma Gandhi talks about love as “the supreme Law of our being.” And he says “All the saints of the world, ancient and modern, were each according to [their] light and capacity a living illustration of that supreme Law of our being.”

<https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/mind-of-mahatma-gandhi/the-gospel-of-love.php>

Today’s scripture reading ends with the Golden Rule, “Do to others what you would have them do to you.” This is a good rule, it’s a fair rule and there’s a reason it’s called Golden. But Jesus’ instructions to his disciples, and to us, go even further. Jesus says, “When someone takes what is yours, don’t demand it back.” That doesn’t sound fair does it?

True love lives and moves beyond the arena of fairness; it keeps no accounts. It is a gift and not a payment; true love requires neither prior merit nor subsequent compensation. It is completely free. This is the kind of love that Mahatma Gandhi was talking about. This love, this supreme Law of our being, is unconditional and is given without justification or any expectation of having it reciprocated.

This kind of love is called grace. It is the kind of love that we receive from God. It is the kind of love that we should be aiming for everyday of our lives. This is the kind of love that unconventional saints and holy troublemakers have offered to their friends and their enemies for generations. This is the kind of love that leads to saintly living. It won’t be easy, but may we all strive to live and love with grace. May it be so. Amen.