

Daphne C. Cody  
St. Elisabeth, Glencoe  
November 2, 2008 All Saints Sunday

Mapquest to God's Kingdom

Revelation 7:9-17; Matthew 5:1-12

Happy All Saints Sunday, everyone. *All the Saints*. I ask you to pull out from the back of the pew in front of you a red Book of Common Prayer, and turn to page 19, and leaf through to page 30. See the saints remembered in the Episcopal Church? And we've added more since 1979 when this book was printed. We've added: Kamehameha and Emma of Hawaii, Vida Scudder, and Harriet Tubman. We've added Martin Luther King, Jr. and Oscar Romero. See all these saints? Whom do you remember and love from this list? Who are your heroes? Which century do they come from? What is it about them that touches you?

It's certainly not that they were just nice people. In fact, some of them weren't nice. Some of them were grumpy and angry. Some of them had big egos.

Some of them were highly unpopular in their day. For almost none of them can

we proclaim that their work is over. William Wilberforce may have lived two hundred years ago and his work led to the abolition of the slave trade in England, but slavery is still not abolished in this world even now. Richard Hooker may have lived four hundred years ago and his work led to an Anglican theology that we can hang our hats on, but Anglicans are not finished trying to figure out what Hooker really meant and what it means for us. St. Francis of Assisi may have lived eight hundred years ago and his work led to the creation of an ethic toward the poor in a capitalist society, but we still struggle with what to do about the poor in our capitalist society.

We might say these saints accomplished things in God's kingdom, but we might also see that their causes and struggles go forward. Were these saints pillars of virtue? Some probably were. Most were just regular people who found themselves in situations that called for action, and they went for it. St.

Bernadette is known to have said, "Don't show me their virtues. Show me their shortcomings and tell me how they overcame them!" But really, we, and they, all

live with our shortcomings. We can attempt to manage them, but our shadows do tend to follow us around.

The thing about the saints is not so much what they accomplished for God, but in fact how they let God work for them. St. Mary, the God-bearer, according to St. Luke, perhaps has said it best, back before Jesus was even born. “Let it be, God, according to your word.”

We make our vows at the baptismal font, and we remember the saints, and from there we tend to make some sort of push to discover what it is Jesus wants us to do for him. It's only natural that most of us cower under the pressure, or walk away from it, believing that these saints in these pages had some kind of a special quality unattainable by normal people.

We might make our vows and strive for goodness, or peace, or love, or creativity, or wisdom, or what-have-you, but it is God who overwhelms us with all those

things. The whooshing of the water, the roaring of the flame, the blinding of the light, these signs can remind us that God working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine. And God does this from generation to generation in the church.

And the church has been very different in every age. We Christians started out in synagogues and in homes with what they called love feasts and prayers with tongues. We had a period of time of weddedness to imperial Rome when we worried ourselves about what was the true nature of Christ. We had a period of time after the fall of Rome where the church resided mostly in convents and monasteries and Christian life and practice was mostly monastic. We had a period of the great hierarchy of the church when massive cathedrals were built which still stand today. We had the period of burgeoning literacy where everyone learned to read their Bible and it was the only book most people had at home and it was all they ever read. We are in a new period, and we don't yet know what shape the church is going to take in this new age.

Some are predicting that in the very near future many people will get most of their religious nurture online. Currently there are 80,000 Americans whose sole religious experience is on the Internet. For example, there's a web program online called Second Life, and in the world of Second Life there's actually an Episcopal Church where you can go for services. You send your little avatar, a little computer "self" into the church, and you can have your avatar choose a pew and sit down, and a priest will preach, and other peoples' avatars will be there too. You can pledge virtual dollars to the church. They're debating the need for having people pledge real dollars. There's currently a controversy because the members of this Episcopal Church in Second Life want communion. People are arguing about whether or not the sacrament would be efficacious if done in Second Life and received by the avatars.

We don't know where this church of God is going. In generations past, no one would have imagined that people would own Bibles in their own homes. In generations before that, no one would have imagined the grandeur of the

cathedrals in Europe. In generations before that, no one would have imagined that governments would tolerate Christians. The saints in our pages, the saints we name today, would never imagine what we're dealing with today in our church and in our world. They are bound by their times and circumstances. And yet, they are also not bound. They are saints that walk in the light and show us the light.

Leafing through these saints' names, let's name what it is they have in common.

Some are organizers of communities, some are reformers, some are monarchs, some are missionaries, some are educators and scholars – all types. Some are quiet, some are brash, some are ugly, and some are beautiful, some came from wealth and some from humble beginnings.

If we imagine the scope and journey of all of life, from Genesis to Revelation, from darkness to light, from nothingness to fullness of being, we can see that what was remarkable about these saints is that in moving from Genesis to Revelation, they stayed on the path. They stuck to it. They didn't quit or turn off the road. They took life up more and more.

When I look up a trajectory on Mapquest on my computer, I type in my Point A and my Point B, and Mapquest gives me a route and a map. And if, when I get into my car and I follow closely, I will get there. You and I and all the saints are moving from Point A to Point B, from Genesis to Revelation. Some of us are closer to Point A, some of us are closer to Point B. That's just the way it is. In the way from Point A to Point B the saints stayed with it.

That's what they have in common. That's also why we call them beacons for us even now. The saints are like streetlamps on a dark deserted street on a

moonless, starless night. Stick with it, they encourage us. Stick with it. Here we are, lighting the way, lighting the Way that is Jesus. We stuck with it, and you can too.