

***The Great Multitude©*****Matthew 5:1-12; Rev. 7:9-17****November 2, 2014****Rev. Sharlyn Gates*****All Saints Day/Memorial Sunday***

Today we remember and celebrate, with great thanksgiving, the saints who have gone on from this life on earth to the eternal life that is promised to us through Christ our Lord.

We give thanks for the gift of their lives among us and for the memorial gifts that have been given and used in their name ... a legacy that continues on in the ministry here at Holly Presbyterian Church.

We remember with joy our brothers and sisters in Christ:

- Paul Blackburn
- Bruce Dryer
- Marilyn Hope
- Rev. William Lankton

We also give thanks for the memorial gifts given in memory of others who passed away last year:

- Ivah Curle (whose memorial gifts went to replace the sanctuary roof),
- Wayne Koskinen and Leland Wood (whose memorial gifts went to purchase new sanctuary microphones).

November 1<sup>st</sup> – yesterday – is recognized in the Church as *All Saints Day*. It is the day when we remember all those Christians who have gone before us.

I did not personally have the privilege of knowing Wayne Koskinen or Leland Wood but I did know the others. I had many opportunities to visit with Paul Blackburn, and in fact officiated at the wedding which took place in his hospital room as he and his bride, Judy Merritt were married, not long before he died.

Of course, I knew our friend Bruce Dryer. He was usually the first one I saw when I walked into the funeral home for a visitation or a service. His smile was always welcoming. I loved hearing his stories and always was happy when he was the one driving the car for a funeral so he could talk to me and share his memories of the past. Of course he was a pillar in this church all his life.

And Marilyn Hope was too. A dear person who grew up in this church and was such a good friend to so many people.

I also had a couple of opportunities to meet and visit with one of your former pastors – Rev. Bill Lankton. I remember especially, his sense of humor, even as his health was failing.

And I had a number of great talks with Ivah Curle as well, hearing about her days of teaching in a one room school and other memories. Ivah, who lived to be 100 years old!

I think I can say this without being presumptuous ... I doubt that any one of those good people would have called themselves a saint. We often say about someone who is a really good person or someone who has done something nice for us, "What a saint!"

And although I believe every one of those friends named were really nice people – they were also human! Like all of us.

How many of you think of yourselves as being a saint? If you do, raise your hand. Right! Like any of you would raise your hand!!!

We often think of the saints as those people who are named by the Catholic Church as Saints – like St. Francis of Assisi, or St. Julian, or St. Benedict, or St. Augustine. Or Mother Teresa, or one of the Pope's.

A saint – those we have heard about from our Catholic friends - is a Christian who has lived a life that sets an example to follow. They may be a teacher or a leader. Many of the saints were martyr's who gave up everything ... including their lives for the sake of Christ.

The Catholic Church does not make saints but they recognize those whom they believe reached sainthood. I confess that I have a lot to learn about how they determine who those saints are, and why.

What I'm getting at is that, while there is no argument from me about those who have been officially named a saint – I believe that we – even in our imperfect, human state – are all saints.

In so many of Paul's letters to churches, he addresses the members as saints. In Romans 1:7, Paul starts his letter to the church in Rome, saying: "To all God's beloved in Rome, **who are called to be saints.**"

And to the church in Corinth he addresses the Corinthians in the first letter, chapter 1: "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified (who have been blessed, made holy) in Christ Jesus, **called to be saints**, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours."

And to the Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 1: **“To the saints** who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.”

And to the Philippians: **“To all the saints in Christ Jesus** who are in Philippi ...”

See what I mean? These were new churches, new Christians who, yes, were struggling with many things ... some even with persecution. But they hadn't all had a chance to become martyrs or live totally perfect, holy lives yet. But still, Paul addresses them as saints who are made holy, in Christ Jesus.

So I unashamedly call our loved ones who have gone before us – and you, my good friends in Christ – even you, who have professed Jesus Christ as your Lord – I – as Paul would have done – call you a saint.

When we think of each of these whom we remember and who we are thankful for, we can be thankful for their faith and for their lives that demonstrated the love of Christ in many ways.

We heard in the Gospel reading of the Beatitudes what Jesus said about those who will inherit the Kingdom of God. It's an upside down theology for many.

<sup>3</sup>“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>4</sup>“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. <sup>5</sup>“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ... <sup>7</sup>“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup>“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. <sup>9</sup>“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. <sup>10</sup>“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Jesus himself was all these things. Even as he went to his death he did not rise up to over power his persecutors. Yet, even in his meekness, his purity of heart, his mercy – the reward was waiting, as it is for all his followers. The Kingdom of heaven is your inheritance.

Paul writes a lot about how God's children – followers of God's Son, Jesus, have much to face in this life and yet there is joy waiting in the end. He writes in Romans 8 that there is nothing – not hardship or distress, or persecution, or famine – nothing in life, not even death can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus, our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

And then we hear those beautiful words of John who tells about his vision in Revelation: “I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands.

<sup>10</sup>They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

And he ends by saying: "<sup>16</sup>They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; <sup>17</sup>for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Friends, let us give thanks this day and always as we remember our loved ones who have already entered the joy of the Kingdom of God; who have joined that great multitude.

Let us follow in their footsteps as we carry on the legacy of faith they have given to us. Let us honor the gifts that have been given in their name so that their legacy in this congregation will live on and on.

As the challenge was given to the faithful saints in Hebrews 12, so let it be for us as well. For it is written:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, (that is, all those who have gone before us, who are cheering us on in this life) let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith ... " (Hebrews 12:1)

Amen.

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