

The Rev. Duane A. Jesse, Senior Pastor
Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, November 6, 2022

All Saints Sunday/Year C

First Reading: Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:11-23

Gospel Reading: Luke 6:20-31

Sermon Title: “Making Saints out of Sinners”

Theme

In holy baptism God makes saints out of sinners. In holy communion God forgives the sins of all the saints. In worship today we give thanks for all the saints “who from their labors rest.” In the same breath we petition our God for the strength to hear and to heed the admonitions of Jesus in today’s gospel. Sealed by the Spirit and sustained by the Savior’s body and blood, we live with joy as God gives us breath, to the praise of God’s glory.

Texts:

Second Reading: Ephesians 1:11-23

¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God’s own people, to the praise of his glory.

¹⁵I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. ²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Gospel: Luke 6:20-31

²⁰Then [Jesus] looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²²“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

²⁴“But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

²⁵“Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

²⁷“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.

³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Sermon

Today, I have the honor of being the herald of Good News!

Now you might be asking, "Isn't his vocation to always be the 'herald of Good News'?" Good point and you are correct. Even during the last four weeks of a stewardship campaign, I was the 'herald of Good News.' This weekend, however, it will be more obvious.

Today, in a sermon entitled, "Making Saints out of Sinners," I will not only encourage you about the status of your loved ones who have passed on in the last year, but I will also explain to you what God in Christ is doing for you at this very moment.

We all come from different contexts, but when we heard "the word of truth," whether it was in a Sunday School class as a child or seeking solace in a life crisis, that word of truth became 'the gospel of our salvation.'

Usually, when a person comes to faith within the context of the Body of Christ, the church, the pastor will encourage that one to be baptized, because baptism is the faithful response to saying "I believe," even when Christian parents say it on behalf of their child at baptism. The church teaches that at baptism, not exclusively through baptism, but especially at baptism, the Holy Spirit is given to the newly baptized through the laying on of hands and sealing, sometimes called "chrismation," the making of the sign of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized. Arguably, it is in that moment that 1) one becomes Christian, 2) we are given the Holy Spirit, and 3) we become "saints!" About this, the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, our Second Reading, that

¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Now, I would not be offended if there was some polite chuckling. It would be an indication that you were listening. So allow me to repeat myself. About the ritual of baptism, I said,

"Arguably, it is in that moment (the ritual of Baptism) that 1) one becomes Christian, and 2) we are given the Holy Spirit, and 3) we become "saints!"

Now that you were listening, look around the room, maybe at your spouse or your children, and ask yourself, "They are saints?" Look at me. "He is a saint?" Now, reflect on your own life for just a moment because that is all it will take, and ask yourself, "Saint? Is he talking about me?"

Yes, I am talking about you.

Last weekend was the celebration of the Reformation and one of the concepts that Martin Luther, the founder of our faith tradition, fleshed out as he wrote and posted his 95 Thesis was this: *Simul Justus et peccator*, a Latin expression that can be translated 'at the same time, saint and sinner.' I bought this t-shirt at that National Youth Gathering several years ago. Worn right side up, it says "saint." But if I put it on and stand on my head, it says, "sinner." Now I would argue that for me, the right-side-up pattern should say *sinner*, and only if I stand on my head, which I assure you, I probably will never attempt again, should it say *saint*.

In this formula, Luther was saying, in our justification, we are one and at the same time just or righteous, and sinners. Now if he would say that we are at the same time and in the same relationship just and sinners that would be a contradiction in terms. But that's not what Luther was saying. He was saying from one perspective, in one sense, we are just. In another sense, from a different perspective, we are sinners; and how he defines that is simple. In and of ourselves, under the analysis of God's scrutiny, we still have sin; we're still sinners. But, by faith in Jesus Christ, whose righteousness is now transferred to our account, then we are considered just or righteous. This is the very heart of the gospel. So, in addition to Pastor, I would like to be addressed as Saint – Saint Pastor Jesse. Nah, that is cumbersome, just call me Saint Jesse.

Now, you may have difficulty thinking of yourself or other loved ones as saints – sinners sure – but saints? But to argue with this concept is to deny the work of sanctification going on in you. And just to be clear, sanctification is the *process* of being made holy. *Process* meaning, we are not completely holy, but we are making progress toward holiness.

Paul also wrote,

¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.

Now that is saying a lot. Let me break it down for you. Paul prays that the Ephesians come to know God in Christ more and more as they mature in their faith. Remember the Ephesians were not born into the Christian faith as you and I probably were. They had to learn what it means to put faith in Christ. Paul wrote that he prays that God gives the Christian "a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him." How does that happen? I'm so glad you asked. It takes some work on our parts. We learn about Jesus, God incarnate, through the spiritual disciplines but especially through our study of the Bible and regular attendance at church where the gospel is rightly preached. And it has been my experience, that when we are attuned to him, he continues to reveal himself to us. In other words, if we know Jesus, we know how he would respond to any given situation.

And not only did they have to learn what it means to put faith in him, but they had to learn what the benefits of faith in him brings. Paul wrote beautifully, "the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, ¹⁹and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power." Now just try to imagine with me, what the "riches of his (Jesus's) glorious inheritance must be like. God who created everything including the gold and diamonds we are willing to pay such a high price for.

And then just try to imagine with me, what the "immeasurable greatness of his power" must be – he that could not be kept in the grave! That is what you and I have been given – it is ours – today - now! And so I can say with confidence, *today, I have the honor of being the herald of Good News!* And for that reason, Paul wrote that we ought to "^{12b}live for the praise of his [Christ's] glory."

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

Now, back to the doctrine of sanctification – the process of being made holy - if you don't feel you are making progress toward holiness that is a problem you ought to resolve, because we have been given access to the very power of God through God's Holy Spirit, and 'with the eyes of our hearts enlightened', we know better and should do better. And not to let any of us off the hook, including me, we are at the same time, saints and sinners. God in Christ knows and loves us even though we are sinners. And knowledge of that ought to inspire us to do better.

However, in this life, we will never ever accomplish the holiness, godliness, and perfection that is required to enter Heaven, Eternal Life, or the Gate to the Garden of Eden – whatever metaphor you prefer. God is so holy that God cannot bear to look upon our sinfulness, so we are at an impasse – an insurmountable impasse.

But God is love, and so God makes the impasse passable, through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, taking with him to the grave, all our sinfulness. And when we pass on, he, Jesus Christ our Lord, completes our sanctification. We are made perfect as God intended when God conceived us.

To you who lost loved ones this last year, and really for all of us who have ever lost a loved one, I have the honor of being the herald of Good News! God in Christ has completed the work of their sanctification and they are at peace and are made perfect - more perfect than we ever knew them to be – perfect as God conceived them to be. That gives them access to Heaven, Eternal Life, or the Gate to the Garden of Eden - whatever metaphor you prefer, where we will be reunited with them when our days in this mortal life are over. And to that Good News I add, God promises the same for you and me. I will conclude where we began, with the Prayer of the Day.

Prayer

Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen