

## **Twentieth after Pentecost**

November 2, 2014

Barrhaven United Church

Psalms 34 (*revised*)

1 Thessalonians 2: 9-13

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### **Our Saints**

Yesterday was All Saints Day. In my grandmother's church, the Anglican church, All Saints Day was a big deal. Way more important than Halloween - All Hallows or All Saints, eve. But it's never been that important in the United Church. I suspect that if we think of it at all, we think of it as belonging to the Catholics. Catholics have saints, we have - well we don't.

That's both unfortunate, and not entirely true. Those of us who read *Saving Paradise* learned that the very earliest converts to Christianity depicted their saints on the walls of their churches. Those portraits were of real people - the ancestors, the faithful, the founders and sustainers of their church. They were painted as icons, portraits that seem to gaze back at you as you look at them. Icons function as windows into the divine. So there they were, their saints; people who were an inspiration while living and continued to mediate divine grace for generations of the congregation.

Saints are people who, like icons, function as windows into the divine. When you are in their presence, you feel you are closer to God, that you have experienced the holy, that this moment with them is transcendent. Saints are examples of how to live faithfully, justly, compassionately and well. They teach us how to be windows into God's grace and beauty for others.

In his letter to the Thessalonians, a church he founded and nurtured, Paul describes himself and his friends in words that apply to saints: pure upright and blameless. He claims he dealt with them in the most kind, loving way possible - the kind of love that is reserved for and expected in our most intimate relationships - as a parent loves and cares for their child. Urging, encouraging and pleading - never using force - coercive power - always the power of loving persuasion. He urges and pleads with them to remain faithful, to follow the way of Christ, to remember his teaching and example - to live saintly lives - to be saintly witnesses. Being a saint was expected of everyone.

As time went on, the designation “saint” became more restricted and only the church hierarchy could name them. They had committees that investigated their holiness, sometimes for years, to see if they were worthy of being named a saint. Popes, on the advice of bishops and cardinals, were the only ones who could designate a person as a saint. Being a saint was so special it was reserved only for the few.

At the Reformation most protestants gave saints up entirely. This is unfortunate. Diana Butler Bass says we need saints. We need to celebrate the lives of those who inspire and teach us. We need to celebrate those faithful people who have gone before us - who founded the church, who created this congregation, people who were there for us, for our ancestors, in times of struggle. We need to be thankful for them, for without them we might not be here this morning.

Each of us has stories of people in our lives, in the life of this congregation that influenced us for good, who made a contribution to who we are today. We honour those who have inspired us and strengthened us in our faith. On this Sunday, All Saints Sunday, we remember and celebrate them. We will light the memorial candle and read the names of those who have died in the past year. We light the candle, say their name and honour them, for they are still part of our web of relationships.

As we move into our first visioning exercise, remember them and all the saints in your life and in the life of this church. They are our memory that we still feel in the present. Our memory helps us discern God’s desires for the future, the next moment of existence. Who helps you live out the great commandment - love God, love others, love yourself? Who inspires you to live in the persuasive love of God? These people are our saints, among us still. Reclaim and honour them. Amen

c. 2014, Suzanne E. Sykes

*sources:*

*Diana Butler Bass. All Saints Day: A Progressive Call to Remember. Friday October 30, 2009. <http://blog.beliefnet.com/progressiverevival/>*

*Marjorie Suchocki talks about memory, empathy, anticipation in The Fall to Violence.*