

## For ALL the Saints 01 November 2020

There isn't much I know. What I mean by that, is, there isn't much I know for certain. When I was a new graduate with a shiny Master of Divinity degree, I thought I knew far more than I know now. I was going to single-handedly change the world. I was going to bring people to Jesus and spread the Gospel like a good old disciple of Jesus.

That was 13 years ago. Don't get me wrong, I still want to change the world. I still want people to know God and to have a deep and meaningful relationship with Jesus. But I can't do it single-handedly. I don't have the gumption, or the energy.

Every year for All Saints I would ask this question: What does every saint have in common? The answer I was looking for – they are all dead.

But what I know now, what I have learned in the past couple of years especially, is that we are surrounded by saints. If we watch carefully we will encounter saints in every part of our life. In the face of the homeless man. In the eyes of the sex-worker. In the arthritic hands of the school secretary. In the giggle of a newborn baby. We are surrounded by saints.

The past few weeks have been a blur. With four funerals, a lot of pastoral care, three conferences, including Clergy Conference which wrapped up on Thursday evening, I've spent a lot of time looking at a screen. I've listened to experts in the fields of leadership as well as the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada. And as I listen to all these experts, and write down the titles of dozens of books that I absolutely must read, one thing comes to the front of my mind. I don't know much about anything.

In the reading for today, John is revealing the images that came to him. They tell an absolutely fantastic tale of plagues, seals, horsemen, God, and a whole lot of folks wearing white robes. We are told "Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal.'"

The great ordeal. I think it would be safe to say that the world has been through a great ordeal over the past seven months. It has felt, at times, that the political climate of the world is a pot boiling on a stove, threatening to boil over. Perhaps like an old-fashioned pressure cooker, whose lid is not on quite right and at any time, it could burst open and splatter spaghetti sauce all over the ceiling of the kitchen.

Dear God, I hope not.

After spending time with colleagues from the United Church Pacific Mountain Region, and the Anglican Church of Canada, Diocese of Kootenay, one thing is universally shared. We are tired. We are kind of cranky. We see people lashing out at one another and at us.

We are so very blessed to have Dr. Bonnie Henry who is the definition of a non-anxious presence. Not every province or state has a Dr. Henry. Her mantra, "Stay calm, stay safe, stay kind" has resonated all over Canada, as well as all over British Columbia. In fact, I bought a small wooden sign with those words that sits beside my bed.

When I met with my colleagues by Zoom on the last day of Clergy Conference, we had been asked by our Bishop what we were doing for self-care. Some of my colleagues talked about hiking, biking, kayaking, getting out for walks in creation, or writing music, journaling, etc. I was asked what I do for self-care and after shrugging my shoulders, I answered "I try to sleep".

Because the truth of the matter is, I'm exhausted. I think, in fact, we all are. Linda Nichols, the Primate of the Anglican Church of Canada spoke to us about remembering to nurture our relationship with Jesus first and foremost. She reminded us to pray, to meditate on scripture. To nourish our souls as well as our mind and body.

A colleague of mine who is also in shared ministry, made a startling observation. He said we should walk back from saying "mental illness" because illness insinuates that there can be treatment and cure, to instead, saying "mental exhaustion" because, that's the state that many of us are in.

I was devastated to learn that an Episcopal colleague of mine who died early last month, at the age of 57, died by suicide. This is a man who, at outward appearance, had the world in his pocket. And yet, he was struggling mightily. A few months before, his father had died in residential care, from complications of Alzheimer's disease. His first grandchild was born in London, England and he wasn't able to be there for the birth. He had gone on medical leave. And, I suspect, things simply became too much. The pain got too great, the fatigue too strong, and he ended his life.

Earlier this week I received a thank you note from a parishioner and friend. In it she detailed how thankful she is for me and for my ministry. I am very grateful to her and her ministry. And I am grateful for all of you. That note touched my heart deeply.

We have moved from the Season of Creation, into the Season of Thanksgiving, and now into the Season of Remembering, as we acknowledge All Saints Day today, All Soul's Day tomorrow, and Remembrance Day on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November. These are less than ideal times to be mourning.

We have risen to the challenge of Worship in pandemic times. We have cleaned and re-opened our beloved buildings. Things do not look the same as they did seven months ago. And it's quite likely, seven months from now, that they will be different again. Yet we persevere.

In yesterday's email I sent a link to a message from our Primate, a Message of Hope. I also posted it on the Facebook page for Christ Church and my own personal page. It is a message for the Church Universal. While she is the head of the Anglican Church of Canada, the message she has for us is one that crosses denomination, and even Interfaith. I encourage you to watch it.

Every Wednesday we hear the biography of a Saint from the Big Book of Women Saints, written by Sarah Gallick. There is quite a process to become an official saint that involves miraculous healing, witnesses, and other assorted miracles. And while this is All Saints Day, it stands for more than the "official" Saints of the Church, the Saints on Earth and in Heaven. It stands for the Carole's and the Mary's. For the Scott's and the Jael's. For the Bruce's and the Bill's. For the Lynda's and the Edith's. For the Suzanne's and the John's. For the Orlan's and the Ev's. For the Zelma's and the Beulah's. For those who have gone before us, those who are with us now, and those who are yet to be born.

In the next three weeks I will have the joy of a baptism at Christ Church; a wedding at Knox United and a Regional Meeting by Zoom. Within this time I'll be writing an Advent Lessons and Carols liturgy that will be used on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November because I will be on retreat.

We are all living in a heightened state of exhaustion. For many people, tempers are getting frayed. Remember, seven months ago, we thought we'd be back in Church for Holy Week, then for Easter, then for Pentecost, then for Thanksgiving. And let's not talk about Christmas...just yet.

The reading for today ends like this, "For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

What reason is that? I believe it is because we make the decision to choose love. To be excruciatingly kind with every one we encounter. To breathe deeply instead of gesturing when annoyed. To put ourselves in another's shoes, to try and see through their eyes.

I had a lovely conversation with a 94 year old semi-retired priest who is quite annoyed that he cannot visit the hospitals as he has done for over 50 years. He understands COVID-19 and the protocols in place. Yet he is frustrated that people will be sick and alone; that they will be lonely and possibly thinking that they have been forgotten.

After the Primate had delivered her third and final address he lamented to me that we are called back to our roots. To follow the Commandments (that was last week's sermon) to love God and to see everyone as the beloved child of God that they are.

The thing about lament is where there is frustration, anxiety, sadness and often anger, there is always a glimmer of hope. "And yet" is a common phrase found in lament.

It's okay for us to be worried. To feel anxious. To be frustrated and even angry. It is not okay for us to unpack and live there. We can lie down in grief and sorrow, but we cannot stay there too long.

We must be gentle with each other. And especially, my dear Saints in this place, both near and far, we must be gentle and kind with ourselves.

We do not know what the future holds. Yet we do know, as children of God, that if we look for the Saints in all we encounter, we will see the face of God reflected back to us. For that, and for you, my beloveds, I am grateful.

Thanks be to God.

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Revelation 7.9-17