

All Saints Sunday

11/6/2016

Holy Spirit

We are all connected. That is part of what we celebrate during All Saints liturgies. We celebrated this reality this past Tuesday on All Saints Day. We remembered our connection to “those whom we love but see no longer,” as the prayer book states. Being human, we are connected to one another over time and around the globe and in mysterious ways that transcend time and space—and even death.

You see, humans are made in God’s image, so we are connected to God. **All of us.** Christians believe God became human in Jesus Christ, so again we are connected to God through Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection. **All of us.** Because of Jesus, what it means to be human has been transformed for ever. And in God’s mercy, God sends saints to us, people who reveal who God is and what God calls us to be as human beings. Today, we remember these saints, known and unknown, in this life and beyond, and celebrate how they connect us to one another-- and to God.

This truth, this reality, may be hard for us to believe or imagine right now. Though we are connected, we are also divided. We have seen and heard this most ominously in our political discourse over the past several months. There is an election this week and many folks are worried—not only about which presidential candidate will win, but also how our country will be able to move forward afterward with grace and justice and for the common good. Some even wonder if it will be possible.

The division we see and hear in the news and on the internet and among our friends and family is a more toxic form of the divisions that have always been there. Jesus addressed it very forcefully in today’s Gospel reading—poor and rich, hungry and full, mourning and laughing, those hated and excluded and those accepted and well respected. Often we have pushed these divisions under the rug of our common life in order to try to get by or keep what we have. The big, bulging mess of our common life has been exposed now, at least in part. What are we to do?

Well, Jesus not only identified the problem—he gave us a way forward. I don’t know about you, but I could use some advice right now. I believe our country could use some, too. So here is what Jesus said:

Love your enemies. Hmm... Should I sit down now? Some of us may start defending ourselves and explaining why this will not work. I even heard a preacher of the gospel from a very large Baptist church in Texas say he would not vote for any candidate who wanted to follow the teachings of Jesus in the Beatitudes as public policy. Now I understand that leaders of large, powerful nations like ours face difficult situations regarding the use of power. That is

one reason why we pray for them. I also believe that love for enemies can be translated into public policy. But we can vote on that.

For the rest of us, our Lord's command is clear: Love our enemies. That can take various forms. A simple one is to pray when someone offends us. To ask clarifying questions when we do not understand another person's point of view. Initiate conversations with people who have different life experiences from us. Look for common ground even with people that we disagree with-- an enemy, so to speak. Find what we can do together to help others versus arguing over our partisan disagreements (especially on FB!). Love our enemies.

A recent example of this is when Archbishop Justin Welby made a trip to Abu Dhabi and met with Christian and Muslim leaders to discuss two main themes—first, how our different faiths can work together for the common good so that **all** our people will flourish. And second (quoting the ABC), *“how we can disagree well... how we can learn to maintain our disagreement but do so without destruction, without antagonism, without hatred.”* Love our enemies.

Our Lord gives a series of related commands following his word to love our enemies—you can go back and read the details. I would summarize them this way—build real human relationships with **all** people, even when there is an imbalance of power between you, whether you have more power-- or they do. This approach will change the dynamic of our relationships from acquisition or protection of power to love. As our Lord concludes—“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Now like most good and wise advice, it is easy to offer and hard to follow. Jesus lived his own advice in how he treated enemies, even praying for them from the cross. I believe that with God's grace we can follow his example-- if we are willing to pray and work at it. You see in life, there is always a power imbalance. That is part of what elections and politics are about—how do we keep ours or even increase it? And our opponents—or enemies—want to do the same. So we often square off in a contest to see who will win and gain or keep power.

Jesus let his disciples know that this contest for power misses the point of life and causes great harm—whether in this life or the life to come. Rich and poor, hungry and full, and all the rest—we have so many needs and so much to offer in both directions! Here is the point-- life will change for us all one day. Here is the question: “Will **I** change? Change how I see the world and my part in it?” That is what **I** want to do. For me, this change would look like a new and beloved community.

Now when we think of a typical community, we may think of who is in and who is out and what the criteria should be for inclusion and exclusion. That is part of what we are debating in our political process right now.

God sees humanity much differently than we do. God is unbound by time and space and definitely unbound by human ideology and desire for power. God sees people—all of us. People who lived thousands of years ago, people all around the world, and people with very different

beliefs and experiences. God sees God's children, the brothers and sisters of Jesus, people—**all people**-- made in God's image and deeply beloved of God. That's what God sees.

On this holy day, we remember God's vision of our connection to one another. Not only "the living to the dead" as the prayer book states; but also as that same prayer continues "the bonds of our common humanity." On this holy day, we remember that we share a common humanity redeemed by God in Christ.

To live this out in community and in our everyday lives will take God's grace and our effort. So how do we do our part? How do we learn about our beloved brothers and sisters all around the world and throughout time? How do we learn in a spirit of humility, not as cultural voyeurs? Here are three practical, faithful suggestions:

Take part in an existing ministry that is outside of your comfort zone. The ministries we do at the Children Center at Lee Arrendale State Prison or that we are just beginning with Family Promise are good options. When we are with people in very different life settings, we realize that we are connected with them. We can serve, we can listen, we can have fun and we can pray; and do all that without judgment. That is one way we can explore the bonds of our common humanity.

Another way to learn is to go on an adventure. Take part in the mission trip to Honduras this summer. The trip will be open to all ages. You will meet children, youth and adults with a very different life from ours. You may learn something that challenges your assumptions. You will learn things that make you cry. And when you come back, your sense of community will be stretched to include more people. We are so much more than our political party, our social or economic class, our nationality, or even our favorite sports team. We are so much more than that—and that "more than" is what God sees when God sees us.

My third suggestion is to read, study, and pay attention to the world. Not to the hateful and usually inaccurate memes on the internet disguised as political banter. **No.** Read a book. Read a thoughtful, well researched magazine article. Join a study group that reads and discusses those types of works. We have a great opportunity for that type of exploration with our Just Faith group which we plan to start in January. We will meet weekly to read about people who are different from us—what their lives are like and what the systemic injustices they face are. Again we can learn more about the "bonds of our common humanity." I hope some of you will join us.

An important part of All Saints Sunday is that we have baptisms. We will baptize Tristan in a few minutes and proclaim God's love for him and for all of us revealed in Jesus Christ. As we pray for him and his parents and sponsors, let us say those prayers for ourselves, too. Let this sacrament of new life remind us that we are connected—and **what** makes us connected. It is not our tribe or nation or ideology—it is the love of God revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.