

“Saints in the Making”

Date: November 1, 2015

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: 1 John 3:1-13; Hebrews 12:1-4

Occasion: All Saints Day

Theme: saints, holiness

Today is All Saints Day. The founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley, loved this day. He wrote about it frequently in his journals. If the truth be told, it is one of my favorite days in the life of the church as well.

It's a homecoming of sorts, a day to remember those who have run the race of life and who have gone home to receive their prize in Heaven. It's a day to give thanks for God's faithfulness in all generations, for in every age God is faithful to raise up Christians who by their lives give witness to God's love and grace.

Originally, All Saints Day was intended to honor the martyrs of the church, those early Christians who died at the hands of the Romans rather than denounce their faith in Jesus. Later, the celebration was enlarged to include all Christians who had died. It was some time in the 8th or 9th centuries when November 1st became the designated day.

The veneration of the saints has had a mixed history in the life of the church. For a time it was helpful and encouraging to recall the heroes of the faith who courageously stood the test and were willing to die rather than deny their loyalty to Jesus.

But later practices began to corrupt the ideal. People began to worship the saints themselves instead of Jesus. Relics of saints were thought to have healing properties, almost in a magical sense. Some people began to believe God was so holy you couldn't talk directly to

Him, so you needed a messenger to carry your prayers to the Lord. And so, for some, they prayed to the saints instead of to God.

At the time of the Reformation in the 16th century, it was long overdue to reform the practice of revering the saints. The practice had been abused. Many of the reformed churches did away with anything that had to do with remembering the saints. They taught that Jesus Christ himself was the only One worthy of their devotion.

Perhaps they threw the baby out with the bath water, for indeed there is much merit in remembering the saints. All Saints Day is important because it reminds us that we are but a link in a long chain of Christian believers, reaching back as far as the first 12 disciples. That long chain will reach as far into the future as time will allow.

All Saints Day reminds us there have been faithful Christians in every generation who have heard the Good News of Jesus and responded. It has never been easy to be a follower of Jesus. It has always carried with it a struggle, a temptation to doubt, and a clash with culture. But thank God, in every age, there have been Christian believers who have remained faithful.

Throughout history God has called forth people to be His witnesses. And without their willingness to answer God's call, where would the Church be today? And so I wonder, where and how is God calling you and me to be faithful in our time?

All Saints Day reminds us that we are not alone in our journey of faith. We stand in a long line of Christians who have gone before us. Today, in heaven, they are watching us and cheering us on in the great spiritual arena of life.

Imagine if you will, a huge stadium. You and I are the players on the field of life. But up in the stands are the saints of God who have left this world, watching us and cheering us on, encouraging us to be faithful to our Lord Jesus.

They have already fought the good fight and run the good race. They watch as you and I live our lives, encouraging us to live righteous, faithful lives that bring glory to our Savior, Jesus.

Do you begin to have a sense of the excitement of this day? All Saints Day is an occasion for remembering with gratitude those lives who bore witness to the goodness of God. They weren't perfect people. They were people just like you and me. We call them saints because we got to see a little bit more of God's light shining through them.

All Saints Day is not a day to worship the dead. Rather, it is a time to praise God for the work of grace in their lives and in ours. All Saints Day should, as every Sunday should, focus our attention on Jesus and the way He changes lives.

If we allow Him, Jesus will make each of us more holy, more like Him. And that is the goal of Christian living, to be more like Jesus. We look to the great saints of the Church, not to be envious of their good works or their good character.

Instead, we look to the saints to see how they allowed God to work in their lives. Not only to admire them, but to be inspired ourselves to be more holy, more Christ-like. Are we all not saints in the making? And if not, why not? That's the goal of following Jesus, is it not? May we all be open to God's transforming presence in our lives, just as were the saints of old. And all God's people said, "Amen."