

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

"The Inheritance of the Saints"

Scripture: Colossians 1:1-14

Opening Hymn: 299 Holy, holy, holy

Closing Hymn: 611 For all the saints (1,2,4,7,8)

Children's Hymn: 648 I'm gonna live so God can use me

Choruses: Blessed be your name

Rev. Steve Filyk

November 3, 2019

All Saints Sunday

Communion Sunday

We run into that word 'saint' every once in a while.

While I was in France and Belgium I visited a few cathedrals.

There were lots of stained glass, statues, and paintings.

Many of those depicted were listed as 'saints'.

If you see someone wearing pendant

With an image and an inscription

There's a pretty good chance

That it also honors a 'saint'.

So who are these saints?

At our last Alpha study we heard a story from WWII

About a Franciscan priest named Maximilian Kolbe.

"Ten prisoners in the concentration camp in Auschwitz

were chosen at random to die

because a fellow prisoner had escaped.

One of the 10... was a husband and parent.

When... Kolbe heard of the man's plight,
he volunteered to take [this man's place].

[To everyone's surprise this exchange was accepted]

Eventually, all 10 individuals died... [including Kolbe]ⁱ

Kolbe is recognised

By the Roman Catholic Church as a 'saint'.

But it's not just faithful people or martyrs

Who are given this designation.

In the Roman Catholic church

There is a process by which 'saints' are recognised.

To be a saint recognised by the Roman Catholic church

you must be a devoted Christian

Who lived a life that was selfless

and benevolent and exemplary.

But more than this you must have performed at least two miracles.

People need to know that you can intervene on behalf of others.ⁱⁱ

That's the Roman Catholic churches' view on saints:

It's a pretty exclusive club.

Most Protestants see things differently.

In our church “All believers are called ‘saints,’
even when their character is dubious...

The reference [saint is for all] those who belong to God...”ⁱⁱⁱ

In today’s Bible Passage

The New International version

simply avoids using the word ‘saint’ altogether.

In the three places where the NRSV,
the version that was read from this morning...

In the three places where the NRSV speaks of saints

The NIV says ‘God’s holy people’ or simply ‘God’s people’.^{iv}

Those who trust in God are understood by the Bible to be ‘saints’.
You and me... we are ‘saints’.

But can we say anything more about the saints?

Are there any particular characteristics of the saints
just like there are qualifications for sainthood
in the Roman Catholic Church?

Today’s Bible passage was written to the ‘saints’ in Colossae.

It describes their characteristics

As well as hopes that the Apostle Paul’s has for them.

So I think it can tell us quite a bit about what it means to be a saint.

But to do this in a way that makes sense,

I’m going to work backwards and forwards through the passage.

Near the end of our reading, in verse 13
Paul speaks of those the saints in Colossae and himself as
Being “rescued” from the power of darkness
And brought into Christ’s kingdom.

He continues in verse 14 to says that in Christ
“we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

This, in my view, is the qualifying characteristic of being a ‘saint’.
Not that we are particularly exemplary in behavior
But that we have been rescued and redeemed
and forgiven by Christ.

“The word translated here "rescued"
is the same word used in the Greek version of the Old Testament
to depict God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt.”^v

Through the death of Jesus
God has rescued us and delivered us.
We have been set free and brought into Christ’s Kingdom.

This is what objectively makes us saints.

But those who have been brought into this new kingdom,
Are called to live in very particular ways.

This is maybe where being a saint has become
Synonymous with being virtuous.

Saints are called to certain behavior.

In his letter to the church Colossae
Paul commends the saints for their behavior,
All that has been reported to him.

This takes us to the beginning of today's passage.
In verse 3 and following Paul shares that he thanks God for them
Because of their "faith in Jesus Christ"
and "the love that [they] have for all the saints".

Their lives have a strong vertical and horizontal dimension.
They are connected to Christ
And connected to one another.

Paul sees the source of this faith and love as hope.

It is the certainty that "blessing awaits us in the life to come
[that] provides the foundation for a faith that takes risks
and a love that reaches beyond our comfort zones."^{vi}

The saints are a people who are saved.
The saints express themselves in faith, love, and hope.
And the saints also have a growing understanding of God's will.

You'll find this in the middle of today's passage.
After praising the saints for the work that they are doing,
Paul notes his prayer for them in verse 9:

“For this reason, since the day we heard it,
we have not ceased praying for you
and asking that you may be filled
with the knowledge of God’s will
in all spiritual wisdom and understanding...”

Why does Paul ask that they might grow in this spiritual knowledge?

Paul continues: “so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord,
fully pleasing to him,
as you bear fruit in every good work...”

Paul wants the saints to depend their understanding of God
so that it might take root and have expression in their lives.

“The knowledge Paul prays that we might have
is clearly more than intellectual.
True biblical knowledge is known by its fruits...

Knowledge of God and his word [will] go beyond the head...”^{vii}
It [will] have a practical expression in our everyday lives.

The saints are a people who are saved.
The saints express themselves in faith, love, and hope.
The saints are growing in their understanding of God’s will
And this is impacting how they live.

So on this basis, would you consider yourself a saint?

Do you know something about God's rescue and forgiveness?

Do you have a hope beyond this life

that impacts your relationship with God and your neighbor?

Are you growing in your understanding of God's purposes,
and trying to put this into action?

Yes... in Christ and through Christ we are God's saints.

We may not be exceptional in our service.

We may not offer our lives as martyrs.

But we are the saints.

We are God's church.

So thanks be to God. Amen.

ⁱ "Saints of the 20th Century" <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saints-of-the-20th-century/>

ⁱⁱ See "How to become a saint" April 28, 2011

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/vaticancityandhollysee/8479255/How-to-become-a-saint.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ J.D. Douglas and Merrill C. Teney "Saint" in Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary 1268

^{iv} Colossians 1:2,3,12

^v Susan Grove Eastman "Colossians 1:1-14, Exegetical Perspective" Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year C, Volume 3: Pentecost and Season After Pentecost 1 (Propers 3-16).

^{vi} Douglas Moo "Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C" *The Lectionary Commentary: Acts and the Epistles* 373

^{vii} Douglas Moo "Eighth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C" *The Lectionary Commentary: Acts and the Epistles* 374