



**November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014,  
The Feast of All Saints 2014: All Saints', Burnaby, BC**

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**Matthew 5:1-12**

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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It was around 3:30pm when nine-year-old Josie and her mother arrived for Josie's acolyte training at my tiny church in the equally tiny town of Castine, Maine. Some would have said that Josie was too young to be in acolyte training, but what I knew was that Josie had a presence that was well beyond her years.

And so the first thing I did was to give her my basic adult spiel about what it means to function upfront in worship: that it's more about a kind of calm and centered presence than

it is about performing a series of actions perfectly (though nothing's wrong with doing things well). Josie listened attentively, nodding as I spoke, but fidgeting, eager to move on to *doing* what an acolyte does.

And so we began the action part of the training. I vested Josie in a small white acolyte's alb and began getting the things she would need to light the altar candles. And so we found the brass candle lighter that typically leaned near the acolyte's seat in the altar area, and we tracked down a book of matches and began to work through how to light the wick of the candle lighter.

It was then that something dawned on me.

"Josie," I asked her. "Have you ever struck a match before?"

"No" she answered, glancing at her mother as if denying some kind of wrongdoing.

"Well, let me show you what to do," I said, "and then you can give it a try."

Now when you have to teach a young person to strike a match from a matchbook, a person who has never done it before, you find out that it's a fairly complicated process.

It involves the following: Opening the book of matches, tearing the tiny match away, and closing the book by reinserting the cover; grasping the flimsy cardboard match and applying enough pressure so that when struck it will ignite, dragging the match across the rough surface of the matchbook, and lighting it, and then quickly withdrawing the fingers near the head of the matchstick in order not to get burned but doing it in a way so that one doesn't drop the matchstick.

This laborious process was what I told and showed Josie.

For her part, she listened and watched carefully. Then, she took the book of matches in her small hands that, by now, were shaking and, much to my amazement did this: She opened the book of matches, tore the match out, closed the book, grasped the match way down at the end, struck and ignited the match and then, in a flash, moved her fingers so as not to get burned but to hold the match securely once it was lit.

Together we lit the wick of the candle lighter, and we were ready to go.

This scene—Josie, the person she was, her intentionality, all that she was thinking and feeling, the way she moved into trying on her new role with those shaky little hands, all these things—have something to say to us today about the Feast of All Saints. For All Saints' Sunday is not just about people who show up on the Church calendar, people like St. Paul or St. Luke or St. Mary.

All Saint's Sunday is about all of us—the baptized—God's holy ones who are daily asked to do difficult, new things with small, shaky hands and with beads of perspiration on our foreheads. All Saints Sunday is about all of us, claimed by God in Baptism, asked to do difficult things but never asked to do these things in isolation or alone.

A slightly more famous saint, Rosa Parks, is a case in point. Parks, who refused to yield her seat to a white man on a bus on December 1, 1955, touched off the Montgomery bus boycott and spawned a movement that toppled state-approved racial segregation in the US. On that day in December when she was arrested, a day she called “the worst day of her life,” she did not act in isolation or alone. No, there was a living web of relationships that surrounded her.

For Parks was raised in the AME church, prayed with her family and read the Bible every day, having a special interest in the psalms, particularly Psalm 27. Before refusing to give up her bus seat, Parks had been active for twelve years in the local NAACP chapter, serving as its secretary. The summer before her arrest, she’d also attended a ten-day training session at Tennessee’s labor and civil rights organizing school, the Highlander Center, where she’d met and been influenced by an older generation of civil rights activists, like South Carolina teacher Septima Clark.

On that day in 1950, in that iconic moment, Rosa Parks did not make an isolated and spur of the moment decision any more than Josie did in lighting her first match. Marked as Christ’s own forever and grafted into the communion of saints, Parks took an action that was connected to actions before it and flowed into other actions after it, all working together to create a movement that brought justice to a people.

You and I are a part of this same communion of saints. Like Josie and Rosa, we belong to God and to one another. Our lives exist in a living web of God-given encouragement, challenge and support. And within that web, no act of mercy or perseverance or compassion or forgiveness or courage is a small action, because it has the capacity to deeply influence and affect others.

And so on the Feast of All Saints what I must tell you is this: what many of you are doing that you perhaps think is insignificant or just a bother is far more than that. It is the place where God’s good blessing is being poured out onto the world through you. And so to take a page out of Jesus’ book:

Blessed are you who live in an empty handed way, for you hold the kingdom of heaven out in your hands to the rest of us.

Blessed are you who mourn, for you give us the courage to lament.

Blessed are you who are meek and gentle, for you show us what it is to receive the earth.

Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you inspire us to seek justice,

Blessed are you who are merciful, for you help us forgive ourselves.

There’s an All Saints storytelling experience I used to do with children. It went like this: I gathered the children together and showed them a large, flat, rectangular manila envelope I told them that in the envelope was an icon, a picture of a saint.

I then began to tell the story of this saint. I told them that God had been with this saint throughout the Saint’s life; that God was there in the darkness before birth, at birth itself, and in the water and the people gathered around at baptism. I told them that God, patient

and attentive, was there no matter what happened in that Saint's life, in the ordinary day to day times, in the times of happiness and in times of sadness. God was there.

After about five minutes of this, I asked the children if they would like to see the icon, the picture of the saint I was talking about. By this time they were frantic to do so. And so I told them I would take the picture out, and that one by one, each child by him or herself was to come up and to look at it.

What I took out of the manila envelope, and held up to each child's face one at a time was, of course, a mirror, so that the icon each child saw was his or her own reflection. I will never forget the faces of those children. For they saw that the saint I had been describing, the beloved one of God at every moment of life, was each of them, was all of them. Is each of us, is all of us.

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#### Sources Consulted and Cited

[Christianity Today, week of October 24](#), 2005 (reprint of Rosa Parks interview that appeared in the April 24, 1995 issue of *Christianity Today*)

“The Real Rosa Parks” by Paul Rogat Loeb, published on October 31, 2005, by [www.CommonDreams.org](http://www.CommonDreams.org)