

## ALL SAINTS AND STEWARDSHIP

Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

*We've all heard of St. Peter, Paul - but...*

Today we celebrate *All Saints Day* even though it occurred on November 1. Something that I read long ago about learning to become a saint comes to mind. In one of Albert Camus's novels a plague threatens the lives of thousands of people in the African city of Oran, Algeria. As the plague ravages the city we overhear a conversation between two atheists, one of them a journalist and the other a doctor who's been trying somehow to check the plague. "It comes to this," says one of them. "What interests me is learning to become a saint." Why would an atheist even think about learning to become a saint? Well, I believe God created atheists and believers alike to be saints. *learning what saints do.*

Our first scripture lesson gives us a hint at how, humanly speaking, we learn to become a saint. We learn by *giving*. Don't misunderstand. We don't earn sainthood by giving money. Nevertheless, I maintain that we learn to become a saint by giving. I realize my interpretation is influenced by the fact that the session *instructed me to preach a barn burning stewardship sermon to inspire you to increase your giving to the church* *Not the word sermon - but* next year. But how do I tie together saints and stewardship? The more I thought about it, the more I realized that all the saints have one thing in common. The saints *give* God all praise, honor and glory. And while they were on earth they kept believing, hoping, witnessing, and *giving*, even when the going got rough.

We're here this morning because saints generously gave of themselves for us: Sunday school teachers put up with us. Grandparents told us stories of Jesus. The high school youth leader arranged for us to go to a Christian summer camp. A Christian friend guided us when we were filled with doubts. Parents went through the weekly ordeal of getting us out of bed Sunday morning and bringing us to church. We're here because the saints in our lives gave time, money, and energy.

So if we want to learn how to be saints we need to learn to give. The saints in our own lives can show us how it's done. I think of an old man stopped by the office once a month. He hands me his offering envelope and shares memories of the saints who surrounded him years ago when he worshiped in the old sanctuary. I think, also, of a woman in a nursing home who gives me an offering envelop to take back to the church. "It's

not much," she says, "but it's all I have." Again, I think of a retired man living on a fixed income who came by the office after the fire in 1989 and handed me a check for \$5000. I said to him, "This is a lot of money. Are you sure you want to give this?" "Yes," he said, "I love God, I love this church and I want to help rebuild it."

When I think of saints and stewardship I think of people who come and say, "I want to give something to make it possible for a young person to go to the Great Escape who otherwise couldn't afford it." I think, also, of people who continue to give after their death. We have a number of special funds memorializing saints. One fund helps the residents of Ware Presbyterian Village. Another helps non-members who have medical or physical needs. Another helps our own members who have special needs.

We learn how to be generous givers by looking to the saints in our life. Think of all the saints who've been a part of your life. The one thing they all have in common is that they're generous givers. They give generous praise to God. They give generously of their time, energy and money so that others might recognize Christ as Savior.

We don't become saints by giving. Rather we give because God first gave us life and love and salvation and Christ. I want to learn how to give like them.

Kay called my attention to a story by a man named Ray Angell in a book called *Chicken Soup For The Soul*. The author recalled a college friend named Paul whose older brother gave him a brand new car for his birthday. One day when he was leaving school, Paul found a street kid walking around his shiny new car, admiring it.

"Is this your car?" he asked.

"Yes," Paul said. "My brother gave it to me."

The kid looked astonished. "You mean your brother gave it to you? It didn't cost you nothing? Boy, I wish..."

He hesitated, but Paul knew what he was going to wish, or so he thought. He was going to wish that he had a brother like that. But what the boy actually said was, "I wish I could be a brother like that."

Paul looked at the boy amazed, then, on an impulse, he asked him if he'd like to go for a ride, and the kid said he'd love to. After a while, the kid turned to Paul and said, "Would you mind driving in front of my house?"

Paul smiled to himself. Again, he thought he knew what was on the kid's mind. He thought the kid wanted to show off the car to his friends and neighbors, but once again the kid surprised him. When they stopped in front of his house, the kid ran upstairs, and after a while, Paul heard his footsteps coming back, but very slowly. When he emerged from the house again, he was carrying his younger brother -- a quadriplegic. When he got down the stairs, he propped his brother up against the bottom step and pointed to the car.

"There she is, buddy, just like I told you. His brother gave it to him and it didn't cost him a cent. Someday I'm going to give you one just like it. Then you can see for yourself all the things in the world I've been telling you about."

This story tells us something we need to hear. Most of us spend our lives thinking we'd like to have a brother who'd give us a car like that. But what we really need is to be a brother like that, to give.

Here at the Oxford Presbyterian Church, we're trying to provide opportunities for people to be a brother -- or a sister -- like that. Through the Deacons Christmas food baskets, through our mission giving, through our blood drives, through the Crop walk, through giving time to help at Wednesday's Word -- and through giving to the general budget. What always surprises us when we do these things is how good it makes us feel. At first we think we're doing these things for the benefit of others. But we learn what that street kid understood intuitively; while it may be nice to have a brother like Paul had, what our souls really need is to be such a brother.

*Thank you all the saints who gave place to Paul ... gave of their time, money, sweat, as you would have faith in Christ*

When you get your pledge cards pray about what to give.<sup>1</sup> Fill out your pledge card as a symbolic way of joining all the saints in heaven saying, "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever!"

Eternal God, neither death nor life can separate us from your love. Grant that we may serve you faithfully here on earth, and in heaven rejoice with all your saints who ceaselessly proclaim your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.