

It's About Time

Year B, All Saints – Revelation 21:1-6a

preached at St. Paul's, Henderson, November 1, 2015

Lord, take my eyes and see through them. Take my lips and speak through them. Take my soul and set it on fire with love for thee. Amen.

We're counting down the last few Sundays of the long, long Ordinary time, the numbered or normal season after Pentecost, and heading, before the month is over, to the beginning of a new Church Year with a new Advent. But today we take a break from the long, long green season to celebrate the Feast of All Saints. We take a break from the flow of our numbered, normal readings from Mark's Gospel and the Letter to the Hebrews, to join John the Beloved as Jesus defies even death for the love of a friend, and John the Divine at the end of Scripture, and at the end of time, and at the end of death, writing those words that are "trustworthy and true," of the "Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." We take a break from Ordinary time to remember those men and women in the whole *history* of time who have been recognized as being especially holy in *their* times and whose lives continue to be an example for *ours*. And we take a break from the ordinary stuff of our time to remember those men and women who have been that kind of example to *us*, to you and to me *personally*, who have made *our* walk with Christ perhaps a bit more clear, perhaps a bit more dear.

Just a week or so ago, the Roman Catholic Church announced that Pope Francis had named four people as the Church's newest Saints. One was an Italian priest. One was a Spanish nun. And for the first time in the history of the Church, there was a married couple with children, which *I* thought was interesting, not that it should happen, but that it's a first. The whole process of how the Catholic Church gives people that status is extremely complicated and usually quite lengthy and involves investigations and trials and deliberations at each of several steps along the way. The Episcopal Church is perhaps a little less formal in its procedures – surprise, surprise – but General Convention added some names to our own calendar of holy women and holy men at General Convention this summer, including the Rev. Hiram Kano, a faithful priest from my old stomping grounds in western Nebraska. I'd love to tell his story... when you've got more time to listen. Though we only refer to them as "*Saint so-and-so*" if we got them the old fashioned way – you know, from the Romans – as anyone who attends our mid-week services can tell you, the pages of the Book of Lesser Feasts and Fasts is *filled* with others whose lives of faith serve as models to us today.

When all is said and done, though, sainthood is a lot simpler than inquisitions and miracle proofs. It's a lot simpler than checklists and commissions. And it's *certainly* simpler than General Conventions. The Saints of the Church, and the saints in our hearts, weren't faultless or flawless or even finished, they were just *faithful*. In their time, they were people that did what they *had* to do, but who did it with faith that God would be with them *regardless* of the circumstances. It's all too easy to put the faithful people of the past up on some sort of saintly pedestal. It's easy to make them into marble statues of virtue and purity. It's easy to consign them to the dashboards of our cars, the glow-in-the-dark talismans for our children's bedrooms, or birdseed dispensers in our gardens. It's easy to forget that they led very *real* lives in the very, very *real* world.

In their time, some of them were tortured and killed in exotic and extravagant ways – but only *after* living lives of faithful witness to the love and faithfulness of Christ. In their time, some of them gave up everything they had and went to far-off lands and started schools and hospitals and holy orders – but only in faithful *response* to God's call. In their time, many of the saints of God *worked* for us, and *cried* for us, and *prayed* for us even when we didn't want to be prayed for. And thanks be to God, that he *continues* to call such faithful people to raise us up day by day.

Because friends, no less is expected of *us* in *our* time. In *our* time we will probably never be called to torture or death or even a whole lot of *inconvenience* for our faith. God doesn't need another

Perpetua or Catherine or Tarsisius. But we *may* be called to lay aside our own prideful, self-serving timetables. What God wants from *us* is a heart that is open and humble enough to accept the fact that we are *not* in control.

In our time we may not be called to some far-off land of deprivation and suffering. God doesn't need another Francis of Assisi or Ignatius of Antioch. But we *might* be called out of the comfort and security of just where we are, of just the way we've *always* done it. What God wants from *us* is a heart that is so hungry, so thirsty for *him*, that we will *run* after ways to know him, and to love him, and to worship him, wherever, *wherever* that leads us.

In our time when madmen threaten pestilence and death, and cheer the toppling of buildings, and kill our children at their lessons and our elders at their prayers – in our time when we are stripped of the illusion of security that has for so long defined our world at the same time it was totally foreign to billions of others – in our time when we fear that perhaps this is after all the *end* of time – what God wants from *us* is that we will trust that it is *he* that holds even *this* time in his hands. What he wants from *us*... is that in spite of *whatever* comes, we will hold on to the wonderful and absolute love that in *his* time sent him to the Cross for *us*, for your sins and mine. What God wants from each and every one of us... is no more, and no less, than *faithfulness* to the Good News of Jesus Christ... for *us*.

You see, at the *end* of time, when the One seated upon the throne pronounces, "Behold, I am making all things new!" faithfulness is all that really counts for anything. At the end of time, when the Alpha *is* the Omega, when time gets rolled up as the creature it is, when the beginning *is* the end, all that counts is that you and I have listened for, and have *done* what we have been called to do, that we have loved God, and that we have loved each other. At the end of time, when we all stand before that eternal throne, all that will matter is that the one seated there has declared, "It is *finished!*"

We need not dwell on the times past. We need not fear the times to come. Because in *our* time, we are called by the Almighty Father of all to be his saints, right here, right now.