

Meatloaf

All Saints, Year C – Luke 6:20-31

preached by the Rector at St. Paul's, Henderson, November 3, 2013

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.

You will notice that this morning, in place of our usual colorful little Scripture insert, we have a home-made, black and white version. We did the same thing last year at this time. Though this Sunday we have a choice to celebrate the Feast of all Saints, since most of us didn't get, or at least didn't *take* the opportunity to celebrate that Feast on Friday, for some reason, our supplier of colorful little Scripture inserts gave us only the readings for Proper 26. But as you will hear from any of the regulars at our mid-week celebration of the Eucharist, (plug!) I think it's important for us to remember those that have gone before us in the faith, those who have blazed a trail for us to follow. So we made our own little Scripture inserts. That is, Judy made them for us.

For the last twenty-something weeks since Pentecost we have heard a great deal of Jesus teaching, like this morning's portion from the Sermon on the Mount, the so-called Beatitudes. We have heard about many of his miracles, like the healing of the centurion's slave or the ten lepers. And we have heard many of Jesus' parables, his stories about how the Kingdom of God is like... a shepherd with a lost sheep... or a woman with a lost coin. So this morning, for our celebration of all the Saints of God, I *too* want to tell a parable.

The Kingdom of God... is like... meatloaf! Now, like any parable, you're going to have to stick with me here, or you'll miss it. The Kingdom of God, the Christian life, the pathway to saintliness... is like meatloaf.

Okay, here's your chance for a little audience participation. How many of you have ever, in however long your life has been, from youngest to most... experienced, how many of you have eaten meatloaf? [wait] Go ahead, raise your hand. Well, if that's not all of you, it's pretty close. So our metaphor, our frame of reference, is pretty good. Probably a lot more of you that can personally relate to a lost sheep.

So let's talk about meatloaf for a little bit. Not gourmet meatloaf, mind you, though I've heard there *is* such a thing. Let's talk about just plain old, everyday meatloaf, like Mom used to make on a Tuesday. There are probably as many recipes for meatloaf among you as there were hands just now. But they're all basically the same. Meatloaf starts, not surprisingly, with... well, meat. Now, you don't go out and buy a pound and a half of prime fillet to make meatloaf. You use whatever you have at hand. Maybe it's the ground beef that you got in bulk when it was on sale. Maybe it's the hamburger that has too much fat to grill properly. Maybe it's the meat that's been in the freezer just a *little* longer than you'd normally like. Whatever it is, you thaw it out and dump it into a big bowl.

Okay, now you have to have some filler. You don't go out and buy some fancy breadcrumbs for your meatloaf. You use whatever you have at hand. Maybe it's the saltines that someone forgot to reseal last week. Maybe it's the cereal that just doesn't have a whole lot of taste. Maybe it's the left over Wonderbread – the heels that the kids won't eat. Maybe it's the leftover breadsticks from the last time we had spaghetti for our last Wednesday supper. Whatever it is, you crumble it all up, and you throw it into that big bowl with the meat.

Then you get to the secret ingredients – the spices and the sauces that make *your* meatloaf unique, different from the one made by the person sitting next to you. Some of these ingredients you've discovered on your own, during your long meatloaf making career. The pinch of this or the dash of that that by now just seems second nature. But most of these secrets have less to do with your own creativity than with how your *family* makes meatloaf, or how people in your part of the country make meatloaf. You add a splash of a certain sauce or a shake of a certain spice because, well... "That's how it's always been done."

Finally, there's an egg and a splash of water to bind everything together, and you mix it.

Now, I don't know about you, but when I was about ten, my mama taught me that there is only one right way to *mix* a meatloaf, and since that time, I have had her teaching confirmed by many TV cooks, and some real-life ones as well. To make meatloaf, you use your hands. You stick both hands down into that bowl of cold *stuff*, and you mix, and you mash, and you mangle, until everything in there is covered in everything else. Then you form it into just the right shape for *your* meatloaf, and you bake it.

It takes a while to cook a meatloaf, so after all that work, you have to be patient. But when it's done and sliced, set on a plate with mashed potatoes, and covered in gravy... mmmm-mmmm, there's nothing quite like it.

Now, when Jesus finished telling a parable, all indication is that he left, leaving the people to think about the meaning of the story. He and the disciples would go off by themselves, somewhere out of earshot of the crowd, and one of the disciples would say the first century equivalent of, "*What?*" Then Jesus would answer with something like this:

"Hear the meaning of the parable of the meatloaf." Christians are not some kind of *gourmet* human being. Being a Christian does not imply that you are, or are likely to *become*, some sort of special cut of human. The Christian life is made up of the same normal, everyday ingredients as everyone *else's* life. Maybe we're a little common, a little past our prime, a little freezer burnt. Maybe we're a little stale, a little tasteless, a little unwanted. We are a collection of prides and prejudices and presumptions, often having more to do with our family, or our culture, or the place where we grew up than we'd ever like to admit. We are, in short, a bowl of ordinary *stuff*.

Until the Master puts his hands into the bowl and begins to work. Until we allow that common mixture to be touched by the distinctly uncommon. Until that ordinary *stuff* comes in contact with the supremely *extra*-ordinary. Then every particle of our being gets touched by Christ as we are molded into something that is useful to God's purpose, something that is fit to be in his presence, something that is a joy and a delight to the One who made us.

It is fitting and wonderful to celebrate the saints today. It is right to remember those famous men and women to whom we sing praises. And it is a joyful thing to remember those *not* so famous saints whose daughters and sons we all are. It is a wonderful thing to praise their lives and to celebrate their saintliness. But it is important to remember that each of them, too, was made of common stuff, a collection of spices and sauces, the values and cares of the world into which each was born, bound together by the community of the Church, by a splash of water, and by the sign of the cross.

What makes them models for our own lives was their faithfulness to Christ's call, their willingness to be molded in Christ's hands, the unique stamp that Christ put on their lives.

It is that same Christ that makes of each of us a new creature. We are new creatures, somehow infinitely greater than our component parts. We are new creatures, judged not by our own ordinary brokenness, but by the perfection of the one that died for us all. We are new creatures, beloved and blessed. Thanks be to God.