

Grace Episcopal Church
All Saints Sunday 2022
Rev Brian C Justice

Daniel 7.1-3, 15-18
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1.11-23
Luke 6.20-31

Saints in Shadowlands

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God of Love
eternal,
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overcome it.
Amen.

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“Imagine a man in total darkness.
He thinks because he can see nothing he is in a dungeon.
In the middle of that darkness he hears a sound.
The sound is brief and comes from far away,
perhaps the sound of waves or of wind in the trees.
And for the time he senses that he is not in a dungeon but in the open air.
Nothing in his situation has changed.
He still waits in darkness.
Only now he knows the unseen world is greater than anything he can imagine.”

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So says C.S. Lewis in *Shadowlands*.

He raises a profound existential question: how do we see in the darkness?

I.e., how do we know what is really there in the mystery, in the inscrutability, in the darkness of our being-in-the-world?

Or, another way to ask the question ...

How can we see what is unseen?

Like Lewis's man who in total darkness hears "the sound of waves or of wind in the trees," ... how can we in the Shadowlands "know the unseen world is greater than anything (we) can imagine?"

The answers to these questions are revealed in the lives of the saints and in the teaching of Jesus.

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Today is the celebration of All Saints Day. What is a saint, anyway?

Usually we think of the saints as the shadowy figures of history or the sun-lit figures in stained glass windows.

Distant people. Different people. People not like us.

But that's not true. That's not true at all.

In the Preface to the liturgical text called *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*, the Episcopal Church defines the saints like this:

What we celebrate in the lives of the saints is the presence of Christ expressing itself in and through particular lives lived in the midst of specific historical circumstances. In the saints we are not dealing primarily with absolutes of perfection but human lives, in all their diversity, open to the motions of the Holy Spirit. Many a holy life, when carefully examined, will reveal flaws or the bias of a particular moment in history or ecclesial perspective. It should encourage us to realize that the saints, like us, are first and foremost redeemed sinners in whom the risen Christ's words to St. Paul come to fulfillment, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."

So what is "the presence of Christ expressing itself in and through particular lives" of the saints?

I.e., what exactly is the unseen reality disclosed in and through the saints.

Jesus tells us in one word:

Love.

The ethic of love is spelled out in the radical, revolutionary teaching of Jesus. Matthew calls this the Sermon on the Mount, Luke the Sermon on the Plain.

Love.

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

The saints live this.

In the spectacular lives of the saints love breaks through and we see it. The invisible power of love becomes visible in their lives. The unseen and the seen merge. Like the vertical and horizontal bars of the Cross.

St Francis, who chased after the thief not to recover his stolen shoes but to give the thief his stockings as well.

Dorothy Day, who marched and wrote and fasted and went to prison to testify to the reality that every single person is the beloved child of God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who prayed for his Nazi executioners even as he was hanged at the first light of dawn on April 9, 1945.

John Lewis and the brothers and sisters of SNCC and the SCLC, who marched across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday March 7, 1965 to demonstrate to the world that every man, woman, and child has seat at the Table of Love.

The firefighters and policemen, who ran up the stairs of the World Trade Center to do whatever they could do.

... spectacular lives expressing the presence of Christ that is love ...

But I look around this room and I see saints everywhere because I see you who manifest the loving, liberating, life-giving presence of Christ every day.

Your kindness to each other. Your care for friends who are sick and suffering. Your compassion for the clerk at the grocery store, for the children in the schools, for your own loved ones whom you hold so dear.

Your love ... your love ...

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Love is the presence of Christ ... love is the unseen world seen in the lives of the saints.

And your love, in the darkness of time, is like the sound of waves or of wind in the trees to the ones who think they are in a dungeon ...

Your love ... your life ... as a saint in the Shadowlands ... is the light that lights up the darkness.

Let it shine. Oh God, let it shine.

Amen.