

This sermon is not about death.

I have to start with that.

Whenever you hear those words “I am the Resurrection and the life...”

You’ve heard the story before. Mostly at funerals

Jesus, the two sisters Mary and Martha, and Lazarus

All Saint’s Day

Day and passage Typically associated with death.

I was once asked to preach a sermon on death

It was because I was a hospice chaplain

Pastor was going away on vacation

Called me in to preach the service

I will always associate Martha’s Vineyard with death

Because I’ve been with a lot of people when they take their last breaths, I know a little more than I want to about the subject.

But I don’t know much. And neither do any of us.

But what I do know is that there is hope, and that this is not all there is.

And so while this sermon may in great part be about those who have died before us, it is not about death. It is about life

All Saint’s Day was on November 1st.

Catholics and some other churches celebrate it on that day, but most Protestants are celebrating it today.

And it’s not one of the better known days of the church

Not Christmas or Easter or even Ash Wednesday, but it is an important day

I sometimes wonder if we avoid it a bit.

We don’t want to talk about death in church unless it’s a funeral, and even then we aren’t so sure about that

But, this is one day a year when we are called to remember. Not to remember death, but to remember life. To remember those who went before us.

When you hear the word “saint” you might think of some really well known names.

Saint Benedict, Saint Patrick, Saint Francis.

People who the church long ago decided were holy enough to be called saints

Or maybe you think of some holy people like Mother Theresa or others

Sainthood seems like a lofty vocation, one that few people can ever achieve.

But, the reality is, all of us have known saints. And we’ve known them personally

We Protestants don’t have a process for officially recognizing people as saints anymore.

The Catholic church still canonizes people who live lives of immense holiness

We respectfully disagree. While we respect those who were made saints in earlier centuries, we don’t still canonize people. Instead, we understand sainthood a little differently.

When we say “we believe in the Communion of Saints” we don’t mean a group of people who died centuries ago. We believe in something much bigger, and much more powerful than that.

For us, a saint is anyone who has died who has lived a life of belief.

We believe that they have now joined the communion of saints, and have been risen again in Christ.

We believe that sainthood is not an unobtainable holiness, but a grace bestowed by God on those who have died. Sainthood is not about those who have died, but about those who live the life eternal because of God’s love.

We’ve all known saints. They’ve been our family members and our friends. They’ve been the people who have nurtured us in the faith. They are the people who we now miss. And they are the people who we remember today.

And one day, they will be us. Now, I am not a saint. And neither are you. Yet. I’m just a person, a sinner, struggling to try to do the right thing each day. But the fact that I know that one day God will grant me that grace, that one day God will bring me into the communion of saints, doesn’t mean that how I live doesn’t matter. In fact, it means it matters more than other.

We’ve all known saintly people. By that I don’t mean perfect people. I just mean people who have tried in their lives here on earth to be living examples of Christ’s love to all.

Mrs. Green was one of my neighbors growing up. She lived at the end of my street. And she loved children. She’d never had any of her own, but that didn’t matter. She loved us. She must have been about 70 when I met her. When we came to her house she would welcome us in, show us around, and feed us ice cream. She would make sure we were okay. She genuinely cared.

I knew then that she was a very devout Catholic. And somewhere in my mind, even at that young age, I associated her kind treatment of us with the fact that she believed in a loving God. I saw the fact that she loved us and treated us with respect and kindness as an indication that the God she loved so dearly did too. It’s sometimes said that saints are the people who God’s light shines through. That was true with Mrs. Green. She wasn’t doing anything that would have made the papers. She wasn’t saving orphans in India or writing the great books on the faith. She was just giving the kids who came to her door, some of whom needed a little kindness extra in their lives, ice cream. But that doesn’t mean that she wasn’t really a saint.

We are all headed for sainthood - so, maybe, like Mrs. Green, we should start acting like it. We won’t always get it right. In fact, we might get it wrong most of the time. But the point is, we try.

I’ve talked before about grace and gratitude. I’ve talked about how we don’t earn our way into heaven. Instead, through grace, we are loved into heaven. No amount of good works will buy us God’s love. That comes from God.

But that doesn’t mean that we can’t respond. Just like you send a thank you note when you are given a gift, you can live your life as a thank you. And, since God has given us the greatest gift we can ever accept, we can allow our lives to be transformed by it. We can live a life not of fear or not the feeling of not being good enough, but instead of gratitude.

The people I know who come to mind first when I think of the word “saint” are the ones who have lived their lives as thank you’s to God. They are the ones who have recognized the grace that has been given to them, and have been so filled with gratitude that their love has spilled out on the people around them. They are the ones who carry the light of Christ’s love in this sometimes very dark world. And when they leave it, that light is not extinguished. Not so long as we pass it on to the ones that we love.

I usually end my sermon with a story. But today, I want you to help me tell the story. On this All Saints’ Sunday, I want you to tell one another, and lift up to God, the names of the saints you have known who have gone before you. Some of you will do this out loud. Some in your hearts.....

Amen.