

BE A GREAT ANCESTOR
ALL SAINTS SUNDAY – NOVEMBER 3, 2019
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How did you come to be in church today?

I imagine a number of us are here for the same reason
that Ava Gabrielle Faimalie is here this morning:

she is continuing in a long line of people who first came to church
because her parents brought them. (We'll baptize her soon!)

Today, All Saints Day, is the day we celebrate our ancestors in the faith.

My ancestors, Anne and Richard brought me, Bernice and Everett brought Anne,
Grandma and Grandpa Wilson brought Everett,

and that's as far back as I'm going because this is All Saints Sunday, not Ancestry.com.

Just as our ancestors gave us physical blueprints that impact our bodies,
they give us a social blueprint that impacts our lives.

Good or bad, we're kinda stuck with our ancestor's physical blueprint, our DNA.

There's not much we can do about our DNA, though science is amazing;

Good or bad, we also develop under the social blueprint, the life choices,
our cultural ancestors gave us.

Unlike DNA, however, no matter what social blueprint our ancestors used,
eventually, we are each responsible for our own choices on how to live.

One of the most serious tasks of being a human being on this planet,
one unique to the human species, is choosing what kind of ancestor we will be.

Some ancestors give the legacy of great beasts, demons, kings and powers
that tell their progeny it's OK to exploit the planet and oppress God's people;
that one human can have what they want at another's expense.

Our ancestors, the saints of the Church, have given us an entirely different legacy:
a blueprint of where we learn how love, bless and support each other,
to be a blessing to the world and God's people.

In the Church, our ancestors gave us the gift of being in the Body of Christ,
teaching us that the best choice we can make on how to live is to be part of God's plan and purpose
to stuff the world so full of love that the world is transformed;
not just the Church, but the whole planet.

The life of Christ is one of love in action, and it's the destiny for all creation;
this destiny is JOY: Peace, freedom, abundance and hope for all the world.

Now, if we really believe that God is God and that God's plan will be accomplished,
that God's blueprint for us is the kind of peace, freedom, abundance and hope
that Jesus Christ showed us every day of his life among us;

if we really believe that God cannot not be stopped, even by death;

if we really believe that the power that raised Jesus from the dead

is totally capable of overcoming any punk wickedness we come up with,

then why on earth would we choose to use any other blueprint for our lives

than the life of Christ? Why fight against it? In the end, it won't work, anyway.

But, because we have free will, and because the world teaches greed is good,
we can choose the world's way of grabbing for all the gusto we can get,
and teach our progeny that the one who dies with the most toys wins.

Or, we can choose Jesus' way, the way of self-giving and loving our enemies,
and teach it to our children as a way to live eternal life now.

Now I can understand that the blueprint Jesus lays out in the Gospel may make some of us wonder if there's room for us.

If we are truly poor, hungry, weeping, and rejected, then we his words in today's Gospel as good news.

If we're not poor, hungry, weeping and rejected, though, Jesus has harsh words.

But, Jesus' words are NEVER uttered just to make us feel terrible.

Jesus' life on earth was spent as a rabbi, a master who teaches.

Jesus says this stuff so we can look at the blueprint of our lives and see if it matches God's plan and purpose for our lives.

If our lives aren't currently focused on God's plan and purpose, we have the freedom to change the blueprint we're using and do as God does, using our riches to feed the poor, comfort the weeping, and welcome the hated.

Why? Because God has done it for us.

I think I can say without too much argument that the Creator of the universe, the Lord of Sea and Sky, the Alpha and Omega, the Father of Glory, is not poor, hungry, or oppressed.

God took heaven's divine riches: life, abundance, and power, and gave them to us.

God gave us this astonishingly beautiful planet and all the creatures;

a huge variety of food and the resources to make homes;

God gave us amazing minds, creative and unique among all creatures,

so we can actually see God actively working toward to heal Creation,

letting us see the vision of God's will being done on earth as in heaven

where we give each other good gifts, sharing, feeding, comforting,

healing, and blessing each other as God does us

This life of doing God's will on earth as in heaven

is the one God planned for all humanity to have – indeed, all creatures.

When Jesus tells us how terrible things will be for some of us,

Jesus isn't making a threat: he's giving us a reality check.

A selfishness life that ignores others, that causes grief, woe, and damage

to both creation and people, will cause us terrible remorse when, on that last day,

we look back at what we did with the gifts God gave us.

Rabbi Jesus is teaching us to choose our blueprint for living right now,

wherever we are in our span of days, to spare us as much remorse as possible,

if we, to the best of our personal ability,

have used God's blessing to be a blessing to both creation and people.

We may not have Rabbi Jesus physically in front of us, but we do have the church.

As the letter to the Ephesians says, the church is Christ's body,

The role of the church has always been to teach people to be like Jesus Christ,

whose life was lived to teach us how to stuff the world so full of love

that the world is transformed; not just the Church, but the whole planet.

This is the blueprint our ancestors in the faith have handed on to us for 2,000 years.

Now saints of the church are teaching US how to become great ancestors¹ also:

to pass on to our children, our children's children,
and our children's children's children, a beautiful, clean planet,
and a social order of justice, peace, forgiveness, and wholeness.

The lesson plan the Episcopal Church uses to explain God's blueprint
and teach us how to become great ancestors, is the Baptismal Covenant.

At Good Shepherd, on the day of a baptism, the day someone chooses
to use God's blueprint for their lives or their child's life,
we show our solidarity by recommitting ourselves to that blueprint, too.

Let's take a look at the lesson plan; it's on page [4/6] of the bulletin.

God's plan is for us renounce Satan and all the spiritual forces of wickedness that rebel against God;

to renounce the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God;

to renounce all sinful desires that draw you from the love of God.

Then we turn toward the life of Jesus Christ: we accept him as our Savior,

we put our whole trust in his grace and love, we promise to follow and obey him as your Lord.

But, who is this God, this Lord and Savior? Of all the possible gods humans can choose,
which God are we following? That's who we describe when we say the Creed.

"Creed," from the Latin *Credo*, means literally to give our hearts, to love.

We love the God who created the cosmos and shares it with us as our home.

We love the God who shares his life with us, and whom death can't stop.

We love the God who shares power with us, who empowers us
and who blesses us to be a blessing to the world and everything in it.

How do we bless the world? That's what the next part of the lesson plan is about.

It's a tough lesson in many ways, though.

God's plan and purpose is in direct opposition to the current social blueprint of selfishness,
oppression, and exploitation that the powers of wickedness and evil want to impose on us.

We commit to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship,
in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers –

to gather with the saints who came before and the saints now in hope and joy.

We commit to resisting evil, meaning we examine fearlessly
how we currently choose to live and match it against Christ's life
and God's will, changing what we need to change,
remembering that God is not the God of just 2nd chances, but 70 times 70 chances.

We commit to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ
and to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself,
to strive for justice and peace among all people,
respecting the dignity of every human being.

This means we keep learning from our Rabbi Jesus

and all the saints past and present the ways of being Jesus' body,

Christ's hands and feet, of treating each other as we want to be treated,
being a blessing to all people, not just those like us,

and even our enemies. Like Christ, we are to stop the cycle of violence.

¹ My thanks to the Rev. Dr. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas for this provocative concept. She encouraged to be great ancestors during her concluding remarks on Friday evening on, Nov. 1, 2019, when she was the keynote speaker at *Caring for Creation: A Call to Action*, a conference hosted by the Society of the Companions of the Holy Cross from Oct. 31-Nov. 2, 2019, at DaySpring Conference Center in Parrish, FL. The Rev. Dr. Bullitt-Jonas is Missioner for Creation Care for the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ.

It's only with God's help and power we even hope to TRY to do all this,
stuffing the world with love when the predominant social blueprint
depends so much death to control us.

Like I said, though, God's power vanquished death, so God has this.

This morning, we can choose to join all the saints before us
who stuffed the world with love, not only in being disciples who do the same thing today,
but in committing to be great ancestors to the children of God
who won't be here for many, many more tomorrows.

COLLECT OF THE DAY

Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

DANIEL 7:1-3, 15-18

In the first year of Babylon's King Belshazzar, Daniel had a dream—a vision in his head as he lay on his bed. He wrote the dream down. Here is the beginning of the account: I am Daniel. In the vision I had during the night I saw the four winds of heaven churning the great sea. Four giant beasts emerged from the sea, each different from the others.

Now this caused me, Daniel, to worry. My visions disturbed me greatly. So I went to one of the servants who was standing ready nearby. I asked him for the truth about all this. He spoke to me and explained to me the meaning of these things. "These four giant beasts are four kings that will rise up from the earth, but the holy ones of the Most High will receive the kingship. They will hold the kingship securely forever and always."

PSALM 149...

Hallelujah! Sing to the LORD a new song; sing his praise in the congregation of the faithful.

Let Israel rejoice in his Maker; let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.

Let them praise his Name in the dance; let them sing praise to him with timbrel and harp.

For the LORD takes pleasure in his people and adorns the poor with victory.

Let the faithful rejoice in triumph; let them be joyful on their beds.

Let the praises of God be in their throat and a two-edged sword in their hand;

To wreak vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples;

To bind their kings in chains and their nobles with links of iron;

To inflict on them the judgment decreed; this is glory for all his faithful people. Hallelujah!

EPHESIANS 1:11-23

We have also received an inheritance in Christ. We were destined by the plan of God, who accomplishes everything according to his design. We are called to be an honor to God's glory because we were the first to hope in Christ. You too heard the word of truth in Christ, which is the good news of your salvation. You were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit because you believed in Christ. The Holy Spirit is the down payment on our inheritance, which is applied toward our redemption as God's own people, resulting in the honor of God's glory.

Since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people, this is the reason that I don't stop giving thanks to God for you when I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, will give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation that makes God known to you. I pray that the eyes of your heart will have enough light to see what is the hope of God's call, what is the richness of God's glorious inheritance among believers, and what is the overwhelming greatness of God's power that is working among us believers. This power is conferred by the energy of God's powerful strength. God's power was at work in Christ when God raised him from the dead and sat him at God's right side in the heavens, far above every ruler and authority and power and angelic power, any power that might be named not only now but in the future. God put everything under Christ's feet and made him head of everything in the church, which is his body. His body, the church, is the fullness of Christ, who fills everything in every way.

LUKE 6:20-31

Jesus raised his eyes to his disciples and said "Happy are you who are poor, because God's kingdom is yours. Happy are you who hunger now, because you will be satisfied. Happy are you who weep now, because you will laugh. Happy are you when people hate you, reject you, insult you, and condemn your name as evil because of the Human One. Rejoice when that happens! Leap for joy because you have a great reward in heaven. Their ancestors did the same things to the prophets. But how terrible for you who are rich, because you have already received your comfort. How terrible for you who have plenty now, because you will be hungry. How terrible for you who laugh now, because you will mourn and weep. How terrible for you when all speak well of you. Their ancestors did the same things to the false prophets.

"But I say to you who are willing to hear Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on the cheek, offer the other one as well. If someone takes your coat, don't withhold your shirt either. Give to everyone who asks and don't demand your things back from those who take them. Treat people in the same way that you want them to treat you.

SERMON HYMN: *I Was There to Hear You Boring Cry*

BLESSING:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.

Deep peace of the flowing air to you.

Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.

Deep peace of the shining stars to you.

Deep peace of the love of God to you.

The blessing of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit be with you, Now and forever.