

All Saints C (11/3/2019)

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18

Psalm 149

**Ephesians 1:11-23**

Luke 6:20-31

*The communion of saints is a great patchwork of lives bound up in the life of the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Sainthood is no unattainable standard, no mark of superiority, no false self to show the world. To be a saint is simply to be woven together with the multitude of others who've received the promises of God, and, affirming those promises, to look ahead with hope to their fulfillment.*

Think of the abundance of metaphors for the church in the New Testament – branches on Christ the Vine; the flock of the Good Shepherd; a spiritual house, with Christ as its cornerstone; the salt of the Earth; the light of the world, a city on a hill; a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation; citizens with all the saints; heirs of God's promise; and, among many others, the living body of Christ. As the Apostle Paul writes in our second reading from Ephesians today: God has “made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

This All Saints Sunday, bear with me as I propose yet another metaphor, one that I pray expands faithfully on the scriptural imagery, and that is especially appropriate on this day. **The church, the communion of saints, is a great patchwork of lives bound up in the life of the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

Contemplate this image with me for a moment, will you? Look closely at one of the quilts spread over a seat nearby. Run your hand over it, if you like. Let

your attention be drawn to an individual quilt square. Have you settled on it? Imagine the life of this small piece of fabric, woven some time ago with threads made of specific materials and dyes. The square is beautiful in itself. What, in your opinion, sets it apart? Is it the flourish of color, the distinctive texture, the pattern or theme?

Now, draw your eyes back to view the quilt's larger design. With its uniqueness intact, the individual square is but a single component of the finished quilt, which has been carefully arranged and sewn together to form a beautiful whole. Take time to appreciate the way that each square complements those around it, and imagine how different the quilt would be if any one piece of fabric were missing.

Next, think of the quilt's purpose. It is a work of art, yes. Even so, its benefits are not purely aesthetic, but also practical. The quilt is not only a delight to the eyes, but also a means of comfort to a person in need.

Finally, consider the heart of the quilter. With loving care, she has collected the pieces of fabric, assembled them according to a grand pattern, and stitched them together with a thread strong enough to withstand years of wear, and all for the sake of those who will benefit from the quilt's beauty and warmth.

Does this metaphor ring true for you? How might we understand our identity and purpose as saints of God in light of the image of the great patchwork?

The word “saint” is often associated with a person of exceptional faithfulness and goodness, or at least someone who exhibits a little kindness at the opportune time. *My grandmother was a real saint, we’re apt to say, or Thanks for spotting me my lunch; you’re a saint.* But, sainthood has nothing to do with our worthiness or performance. **Life in Christ is the gift of God, a flood of grace flowing down at baptism to sweep you up into the communion of all the saints in every time and place. You are fearfully and wonderfully made in God’s image, distinctly gifted and cherished on account of your Maker’s creativity and love, and gathered together with the people of God, whether you would choose to be here or not.**

**In other words, you are a patch hand-selected by the great Quilter, conformed with countless other patches to the pattern of Christ, and sewn together by the Holy Spirit. The great patchwork stretches back into history, connecting you to all the patches of ages past – those remembered and those forgotten – and into the future, as the Quilter continues to weave and sew new squares to the quilt in every generation. And, even as your place in the great patchwork confers on you a fundamental dignity, it also gives you a purpose: to keep the world warm.**

Richard Rohr summarizes it this way:

The freeing, good news of the Gospel is that God is saving and redeeming the Whole first and foremost, and we are all caught up in this Cosmic Sweep of Divine Love. The parts – you and me and everybody else – are the blessed beneficiaries, the desperate hangers-on, the partly willing participants in the Whole.... Within this worldview, we are saved not by

being privately perfect, but by being “part of the body,” humble links in the great chain of history.<sup>1</sup>

Dear church, **the life of faith is not striving individually for something you can never reach, or looking down your nose at anyone who doesn't share your understanding of God, or pretending to be something you're not. Sainthood is no unattainable standard, no mark of superiority, no false self to show the world. To be a saint is simply to be woven together with the multitude of others who've received the promises of God, and, affirming those promises, to look ahead with hope to their fulfillment.**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Universal Christ*, 167, 164.