

All Saints Sunday, 2019
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St. Mark's Episcopal Church
Luke 6:20-31

1. COMB ("Commission on Ministry of the Baptized):

- Last week our Bishop appointed Deacon David & me to serve on COMB--which means we were lucky enough to enjoy a marathon of all-day meetings this past Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.
- If you ask someone what is COMB's mandate, they'll probably say "to interview and assess people in the Diocese who are going through the ordination process." Which is only partly true.
- **Wednesday's Work---Begin to Clarify Purpose & Process of COMB**
- Title III Canon 1, Section 1a: "Each Diocese shall make provision for the affirmation and development of the ministry of all baptized persons, including assistance in understanding that ALL BAPTIZED PERSONS ARE CALLED TO MINISTER IN CHRIST'S NAME, TO IDENTIFY THEIR GIFTS WITH THE HELP OF THE CHURCH AND TO SERVE CHRIST'S MISSION AT ALL TIMES AND IN ALL PLACES."
- Talk through the process...someone shows up in priests office saying "I think I might have a call?" What happens next? (Well, it seems fairly obvious to me---according to the Canon I just cited that there are two possibilities. Either the priest asks "Would you like to consider being baptized?" or (if the person is already baptized) the priest would answer something like "Thanks be to God" and/or "duh." Since the canons JUST REMINDED US that "ALL BAPTIZED PERSONS ARE CALLED TO MINISTER IN CHRIST'S NAME"
- **Thurs & Fri Work**--Meet with individuals in various stages of discerning a possible call to exercise the universal call of ALL CHRISTIANS to "minister in Christ's name and use their gifts to serve Christ's mission" in a very specific, particular way, as an ordained deacon or priest in the Episcopal Church.
 - In these many meetings--with 8 or 9 VERY DIFFERENT individuals, with VERY DIFFERENT lives, and VERY DIFFERENT STORIES I heard these common themes:
 - Longing for affirmation of call: "Am I called?"
 - Longing for clarity: Not only "Am I called?" but "To what, specifically am I called?"
 - Longing for community: Is the Church committed to struggle with me, and challenge me, and support me, and stand by me, through the life-long struggle and challenge and joy of discerning and developing my unique call in this church, and in this world?
 - To each and every one of those candidates, to each and every one of you here I want to say this: clearly, and unequivocally:

- **You ARE CALLED.**
- **You ARE NOT ALONE.**
- **You HAVE a COMMUNITY.**
- **You have a CALL.**

2. **TODAY IS ALL SAINTS DAY**

- **What is a saint?**
- (qadosh/OT/Hebrew) (hagioi/NT/Greek);
- Literally: “holy ones” ---SET APART
- “Saints” (in the biblical sense & in the sense that we celebrate them today) are not people who **set themselves** apart, by their exemplary spiritual practices, or inspiring self-denial or heroic acts of goodness
- Saints (in the biblical sense & in the sense that we celebrate them today) are not people whom **THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH** sets apart
- Saints (in the biblical sense & in the sense that we celebrate them today) are the people whom **GOD has set apart**...whom GOD has made “holy ones” by God’s own gracious initiative. We are among the Holy Ones because GOD has chosen to name us, to set us apart, to call us--in community-- to work with God towards the renewal, restoration, and reconciliation of the whole world.
- Why does God do this? It is in, among, and through the Communion of Saints, the community of Holy Ones--including you and including me--that God’s Will may be done. It is in, among, and through the Communion of Saints, the community of Holy Ones--including you and including me--that God’s Kingdom will come.

3. **BAPTISM**

- In the context of the Christian Church, and our Episcopal Church, in particular, Baptism is the sacrament by which God’s action of making ordinary, everyday people into Saints and “Holy Ones” is revealed. Babies and kids and teenagers and old people. People we admire and people we despise. Delinquents and Tattletales, Artists and Engineers. Republicans and Democrats and Socialists and Anarchists. God creates us and God chooses us. God names us and God calls us. And God ties us to a community in which we find life and to which we belong.
- In Baptism, God’s action of naming us, God’s action of calling us, becomes incarnate---In Baptism, God’s call becomes something we can see, and hear, and touch, and remember. In the old words of the catechism: the sacrament of Baptism, is an “outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace.” Baptism is one moment in earthly time that reveals and affirms the **eternal** truth of our being:
- Baptism affirms: You are named: Beloved

- Baptism affirms: You are called: To Love
- Baptism affirms: You are never alone; You Belong. You belong: to God. And you belong: to Christ's body, the church. God has made you an indispensable and inextricable part of this mystical body, this communion of saints, this community of Holy Ones, that stretches beyond this single place and time, to connect and strengthen you with EACH AND EVERY Holy One, in EVERY time and EVERY place.

At every Baptism, around the font

At every Eucharist, around the altar

All the Holy Ones on earth and in heaven call out for you to hear:

- **You ARE CALLED.**
- **You ARE NOT ALONE.**
- **You HAVE a COMMUNITY.**
- **You have a CALL.**

NECESSITY

In Baptism, the priest marks the sign of the cross on our foreheads with oil, and says these words:

"You are sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked as Christ's own forever."

In this morning's reading from the letter to the Ephesians Paul writes:

"In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance... [and we] were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance"

Thanks be to God for this blessed inheritance!

Thanks be to God for this Holy Call that beckons us and this Holy Community that encompasses us all!

Because when (when, not if) the going gets tough, our only hope, really, is to lean more deeply into that Holy Call and lean more deeply into that Holy Community to hold us, guide us, and see us through.

Because this life IS tough. This world IS tough. And at times it can feel futile, and frightening, and impossibly lonely. In case you are having an unusually good day and forgot it this morning, today's scripture lessons are here to remind us.

Daniel:

In today's first reading, we find the prophet Daniel struggling with the terrible dream, in which he sees

“The four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea and four great beasts arising from the deep...”

For the Book of Daniel’s original audience, the sea would have served as a familiar symbol of danger and chaos. The four monsters, in general, would have evoked danger and evil coming from every direction. In particular, the vivid images of these four monsters probably conjured memories of the four great empires--the *Neo-Babylonian, median, Persian, Greek empires*; that had conquered Israel. At the same time, the monsters likely reminded listeners of the abhorrent policies and actions of Antiochus Epiphanes--the latest tyrant to rule over them.

For those of us here today the monsters that arise from the deep to haunt our dreams probably evoke different memories and fears...but in the dark nights of our lives, our own monsters seem no less terrible and terrifying. Where and when do you find yourself at the edge of that deep, dark sea where monsters lurk? Who and What stands behind *your* monsters at night?

When stormy winds blow, and waters churn, and chaos gives rise to monsters that threaten us on every side; When like Daniel, our spirits are troubled and terrified,

We remember our Baptism and we are anchored and upheld by the company of Holy Ones, who echo the voice of the Holy **One** who says:

You ARE CALLED.

You ARE NOT ALONE.

You have a community.

You have a call.

In the dark of the night, that Communion of Saints surrounds you and strengthens you to hear, and affirm and move towards God’s call:

To face each monster as it arises--whatever shape it takes

To hold fast to God’s promises

To receive and reveal the Kingdom of God.

Luke:

In Today’s Gospel we hear Luke’s version of the Beatitudes...which (unlike Matthew’s version) includes not only a list of Blessings but also a list of Woes.

This All Saints Day, as we hear the Gospel, We remember our Baptism and we are anchored and upheld by the company of Holy Ones, who echo the voice of the Holy **One** who says:

When you are poor, and hungry, and weeping

When you feel hated, excluded, reviled

When the temptation is greatest to doubt that you're chosen, and loved, called, and held

In those moments, those seasons, beloved DO NOT FORGET:

You ARE CALLED.

You ARE NOT ALONE.

You have a community.

You have a call.

And when you are rich, well fed, laughing and favored

When the call of wealth and comfort, pleasure and accomplishment

Threatens to drown out GOD'S CALL in your life

When your possessions and achievements threaten to act as a wall to isolate you from BOTH the support AND the needs of the world

In those moments, those seasons, beloved DO NOT FORGET:

You ARE CALLED.

You ARE NOT ALONE.

You have a community.

You have a call.

A call to Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

A call to non-violence. A call to generosity.

A call to do unto others as you would have them do to you.

You have a call.

And you are a part--a beautiful, holy, inextricable, indispensable part--of the community of Holy Ones, the Communion of Saints--on earth and in heaven, in this room, and throughout the whole earth

In Baptism God has knit us together, and given us to each other,

To challenge, support, and remind one another

To listen, to hear,

To answer God's call.

Night by night; and Day by Day.

Amen. Alleluia.