

We Don't Pick The Saints, God Does

Our theme for this Wednesday of Lent is, "In Community With All The Saints."

Tonight, I am using the title: "We Don't Pick The Saints, God Does."

We are surprised when at times we may find ourselves judging someone else as a sinner only to realize we have completely misjudged them. Who are we to think that anyway?

The late National ELCA Bishop, Herb Chilstrom has written a devotional called the Unexpected Saints.

Some bystanders might have asked how can a scoundrel like Levi, a crooked tax collector be a disciple of Jesus.

Or how can Simon the Zealot be one of the chosen twelve? Or a women taken in adultery, how can Jesus so easily forgive her?

Or what about Paul, an enemy of the followers of Jesus, determined to put any of them to death. How can we trust that this man Saul has really become a follower of Jesus.

Then in Hebrews, we find another similar character.

We read about the Biblical characters like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, the prophets and others. Then comes the shock.

Included in this list is "the prostitute, Rehab. She is numbered among the great saints of God. She is one who sheltered and protected Joshua and Caleb when they scouted out the Promised Land and is given the same high status as the others.

It hardly seems fair, but God is not held to our human standards. So as we think about who is a part of God's community, we need to be careful.

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We are not the judge. We are not the ones who decide who the saints are. We will be surprised and shocked to come to see that God is the only one who picks the saints. And that God looks at even the most unimportant, or the most unqualified and sees a saint in that person.

What a great way to see and hear what God is really like. The community of what we call saints is chosen only by God, not by any of us. Sainthood is never something we earn. We can't do enough to earn it.

Again, as we say over and over again. We don't have to earn it, we can't earn it, we can only live with it as a gift. What includes us in the community of the saints is the work of God who sends Jesus to gather us together as one.

The Gospel lesson given for this day is Mark 9:2-8 which is the transfiguration text for Jesus.

It becomes a reminder that our faith is connected to those who have gone before us. Their faith has influenced our faith and our faith influences those who come after us.

Jesus took Peter, James and John up a high mountain and there appeared with them, Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

And the connection is made. A cloud overshadows them and they hear a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him". Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.

What has happened? Suddenly the past and future are all brought together in Jesus. A community of faith is established.

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Now we are given the task of carrying that faith forward and sharing it with those around us. God has picked us as the saints to carry it ahead.

We can only give God thanks for gifts God gives us to share. We become part of the community of saints and we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us.

We don't go through the season of Lent alone. We go through it as a community. And even this year as we are separated physically from one another, we are still connected.

Just like we don't see our loved ones who have gone ahead of us, right now we don't physically see each other either but we are still in this together. Part of what we can learn from our situation today is that we don't need to see each other to be connected.

God holds us together. We don't pick the saints, God does. God has claimed you to be one of them.

We can't judge one another but we can still hold one another in prayer as we have become part of that cloud of witnesses.

And we can sing those words from When The Saints Go Marching In:

Oh when the new world is revealed. Oh when the new world is revealed. Oh how I want to be in that number. When the new world is revealed.

And on that hallelujah day. On that hallelujah day. Oh how I want to be in that number. On that hallelujah day.

YOU ARE IN THAT NUMBER BECAUSE NOTHING CAN SEPARATE YOU FROM THE LOVE OF GOD SHOWN TO US IN THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS. THANKS BE TO GOD!