

Saint Who?

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Farmville Baptist Church

Eph. 1:11-19, Hebrews 11:4, 7, 8, 11, 13-16, 23-24, 27-28 and 12:1-2

Who or what do you think of when you hear the word saint?

If you are an NFL fan – you might think of the New Orleans Saints

I grew up in a predominantly Catholic neighborhood, so if you're like me, you might think of St. Christopher – many of my friends wore St. Christopher medals – or St. Mary – the blessed virgin and Mother of Jesus.

Or perhaps you might think of one of the Catholic Church's most recent (and famous) saints – Mother Theresa who poured out her life ministering to the poorest of the poor in the streets of Calcutta.

Perhaps you tend to view the saints as the heroes of our faith, the spiritual giants that are held up as examples of how we are supposed to live our lives.

That's a valid picture of a saint. In the verses from Hebrews 12 that we heard a few moments ago, we are reminded that we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. In chapter 11 – some of those saints are named – Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Samuel – you don't get much bigger star power than that.

But this A-list represents only a small portion of the much larger community of saints. This group is also represented in Hebrews 11 – the author speaks of prophets who administered justice and women who received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured – suffering mocking and chains and imprisonment, still others were destitute, wandering in deserts and mountains – living in caves and holes in the ground. Of these, the writer tells us, the world was not worthy.

This morning, we gather with churches all over the world to honor the great cloud of witnesses – and to name those in our particular community of faith who have transitioned from this life to the next. It is a chance for us to continue to mourn – because that takes time doesn't it, but it is also a chance for us to celebrate the legacy of faith they left behind. Although our

loved ones may never have made headlines for their martyrdom or great acts of faith, their humble acts of service have not gone unnoticed by God and by those whose lives were touched by their service. Today we do a good and honorable thing by honoring our very own departed saints.

But, wait, as the late night TV ads tell us, there's more. Lots more. For Scripture tells us that all of us who believe are saints – literally “holy ones” or redeemed sinners. I like that phrase redeemed sinners. Often when our pastor gives the welcome on Sunday morning he begins with “Good morning saints”, and few of us offer a tentative good morning in return. He follows that with, “Good morning sinners,” and we all respond with a hearty good morning in return. Aren't you glad it's not an either or proposition?

The apostle Paul, who wrote many of the letters in the NT, was fond of opening his letters with some variation of “From Paul, an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the saints who are in...Rome, Corinth, and Phillipi.” In today's text, Paul (or one of his disciples writing in his name) is writing to encourage the saints in Ephesus.

In verse 11 – Paul reminds his readers that as living saints, they have received an inheritance – not money or antiques or jewelry – but a spiritual inheritance that will empower them, not to live for themselves, but to live for the praise of god's glory.

Then, Paul prays a beautiful intercessory prayer for the living saints. Listen to his words again (read 14-18).

Paul first expresses thanks for their faith – in a day without iPhones, email, text, twitter, Fb, or snap chat, word about their love for others has reached him. The he asks God to bless them.

First, he prays that God would give them a spirit of wisdom and revelation as they come to know God. I like those two words together – **wisdom and revelation** – there are a number of ways that we get to know God – and here Paul pairs two of those ways– **wisdom** – the knowledge that gain from experience or the knowledge that is passed down to us and **revelation** – knowledge that come to us in more mysterious ways – from that inner voice or from a fresh word from a biblical text that we’ve read countless times before. It is a good prayer for us to pray for each other today – that God would give us a spirit of wisdom and revelation as we come to know God.

Next Paul prays that the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened so that they would know the hope to which they have been called. We usually think about seeing with our eyes – and it’s easy to get discouraged that way isn’t it? Tuesday we all go the polls, and on Wed half of us will be unhappy with the results. Some of us can’t even engage in larger social issues because it’s all we can do to manage the struggles that life has dealt us right now – perhaps we’re mourning the loss of a family saint this year, or we have a serious health crisis, or we’re dealing with the effects of COVID, the list could go on and on. But All Saints Day and this passage in Ephesians reminds us to take a step back and see the bigger picture. To see how God has been with the cloud of witnesses throughout the ages. To see, if we look with the eyes of our hearts, the inheritance we’ve been given and the power of God that is available to us.

To see with our hearts is to imagine the future that God is preparing. To see with our hearts is to claim the hope that comes to us as we journey in the company of saints both living and departed.

To see with our hearts means to lay aside every weight and run with perseverance the race that is set before us. To live our lives each day – in ways both big and small – that shares God’s love and hope with the world.

But you may say, can I really be a saint? I get that I’m a redeemed sinner, but I still don’t feel like I measure up. To all of those who doubt, let’s take a look at that A list in Hebrews 11 again.

There is Noah who after surviving the flood and receiving a covenant from God embarrassed himself and his sons by getting rip roaring drunk

There is Abraham – who was known to tell a half-truth when it suited him

There is Moses – who killed an Egyptian and fled into hiding before God called him to lead the Israelites out of bondage.

There is Rahab – the prostitute who worked in the city wall. She made one of the greatest confessions of faith in the Old Testament and ended up listed as an ancestress of Jesus in the genealogies in Matthew.

There is Jephthah who made a vow to God and ended up sacrificing his daughter as a result. I encourage you to read his story – it’s in the book of Judges chapters 10 and 11.

So take heart my friends, the folks on the A list, just like the folks we honor here today were ordinary people. People who claimed their inheritance as redeemed sinners, people who hoped with the eyes of their hearts for a better future, people who were willing to be used by God to help make that future a reality. People we call Saint Abraham and Saint Rahab and Saint (read list from bulletin) and saint who? Saint Joyce and Saint Ken and you get the picture

So this morning, I conclude with these words from William Walsham How’s hymn (For All the Saints)

Still may your people, faithful, true and bold, live as the saints who nobly fought of
old. And share with them, a glorious crown of gold,

Alleluia, alleluia.