

Be a Saint – Don't Wait

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The Celebration of the Communion of Saints
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Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9; Revelation 21:1-6a; John 11:32-44

“See, the home of God is among mortals.” -- Revelation 21:3

I was down at the Federated Church yesterday for the annual meeting of our Western Reserve Association and the Eastern Ohio Association, and I heard something lovely and interesting that I wanted to bring back to you. It fits the occasion we're marking today, which is the Celebration of the Communion of Saints or, in its short form, All Saints Day.

Professor Jan Linn was speaking about his book, *A Different Jesus*, which he's been discussing in some of the churches in our two associations for the past week. Jan told us that his book, which is subtitled *A Christian Theology Big Enough for an Interfaith World*, had its genesis back in his Disciples of Christ roots. The Disciples of Christ, which some of you were before joining the UCC, are also known as the Christian Church, and the reason the Disciples chose that name for themselves was to try to overcome some of the sectarian divisions within the Christian – the big Christian – tradition.

And for a long time, the Disciples have had a motto about themselves that they like to repeat, which is “We know we're only Christian, but we're not the only Christians.”

Isn't that lovely? Isn't that sensible? And isn't it true? “We know we're only Christian, but we're not the only Christians.” What a neat way to express one's ecumenical identity.

And what a neat way to think about today, when we celebrate the communion of saints. We celebrate today the fact that we at Faith United Church of Christ are only Christian – and that's all we need to be – but we're not the only Christians. We're not the only Christians in time, space, or type. We're surrounded, in that wonderful phrase from Hebrews, by a great cloud of witnesses, whose souls, our first reading reminds us, are in the hand of God, which is the same place our souls reside.

This is the great Sunday of the church year when we celebrate the fact that in our faith, the Christian faith, the boundary between the living and the dead is stretched to its thinnest, and we pick up the story of people like Herb Cover, Ed Jackse, Frances Olhava, and Midge Rasey where they left off when they died.

Because, since their souls and our souls are all in the hands of our living, still-speaking God, their stories and our stories are all part of God's story, which God is still speaking. They stopped speaking their story in one way when they died – and we don't pretend that they didn't die – but their voices and their stories live on in ways that don't require voices.

Ed Jakse, for instance, is still speaking to me whenever we have a meal here at church and the dishes need to be washed, which is pretty much every meal. In the whoosh of the dishwasher I hear Ed speaking and I see Ed serving the needs of this church and our guests. We eat together to remind ourselves of who we are and what

we're up to – what's happened to us since we were last together, the things that brought us pain, the things that brought us joy – and by telling those stories about ourselves and listening to the stories of others – really listening and not just waiting for our chance to speak -- we knit up a bit more of our common identity. We turn ourselves more into this church. We grow the body of Christ. And Ed helped us do that. He helped build up the body of Christ although he probably thought he was just doing the dishes.

And if I had time this morning, and knew more about the other folks whose names we have spoken in remembrance and thanksgiving, I could tell you similar stories about each of them. They all in their own way knew that they were only Christian and that they weren't the only Christians. There were other Christians who needed what they had to offer – the lessons Midge Rasey prepared for her students, the poetry that Herb Cover wrote, the model cars and trucks Frances Olhava brought for David Nedrow – and so they offered what they had to give. They gave of themselves for the sake of the world, and so lived out the Christian life on earth.

And that's the only place the Christian life is needed – right here on planet earth. However good you are, however hard you're striving, however much you want to be a follower of Jesus Christ, none of that is needed in heaven someday. It's needed on earth today. Sainthood is not for when you die; it's for while you're alive, and it only has meaning by and for the living. Heaven doesn't need your devotion to God and to your profession; we do. Heaven doesn't need your patience, wisdom, and understanding; we do. Heaven doesn't need the witness of your struggles to turn yourself over to God, heart mind, body, and spirit – we do. Heaven doesn't need you, but we do.

So let God make you you, the you that we and our broken and beautiful world need. We've all heard someone described as a saint. What do we mean by that? We simply mean that they did now what all of us know we can do someday – they let God make them them. And they did it now, not later. They got on with the business of living for God and not living for themselves, and they stopped delaying. That's all they did. They did what all of us have it in our power to do – they got themselves out of the way so that God make them them. And that's all that made them a saint.

So my message to you this morning, dear friends, is short and sweet. Be a saint and be it now – don't wait.