

Texts: Matthew 5: 1-12

Go in peace, your faith has made you whole!" Jesus said this to people who had made no dogmatic affirmations, did not think he was "God," did not pass any moral checklist, and often did not belong to the "correct" group! *They were simply people who trustfully affirmed, with open hearts, the grace of their own hungry experience—in that moment—and that God could or would even care about it!* (Richard Rohr [Eager to Love](#))

In anticipation of this All Saints Sunday, I asked a few people in the congregation about saints they have known. They were all stumped. Maybe you can guess why. When you hear the word saint, who do you think of? Maybe Mother Teresa. Or maybe people from long ago, that we have never met, like St Paul, or St Augustine, these towering figures. Saints are not only for Catholics. We have lots of Presbyterian churches named after saints too: Saint Andrew, St Columba, St Cuthbert, St Stephen St Mark's St David's St James St Peter. But there still all from long ago. When I was a kid, my mother would comment on someone who patiently endured suffering; the martyr-type: "She is such a saint." Occasionally it was my dad she talked about, because of his work with the church. I don't remember the word "saint" ever being used to describe one of us kids 😊 but at least if my dad was a saint it came a little closer to home.

We don't easily think of ourselves, or people we know as saints.

We have all met extraordinary people who seem to be able to care for others in utterly selfless ways. We are grateful for them and for how they inspire us, and maybe they are saints even if they don't call themselves Christians. Some would say that since God is love, any expression of self-giving love is a response to God, whether they would describe it that way or not.

When we pay attention to Scripture, it's a bit of a surprise. The Hebrew word *qadosh* is used for the whole people of Israel, whom we know were neither long-suffering nor particularly exemplary in their behavior much of the time. ***But they were chosen.*** Deut 7:6: "You are a people holy to the Lord; the Lord you God has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession". The Biblical meaning of Sainthood lies only in being chosen. New Testament shows a similar meaning.

Do you remember when we were talking about Jacob, and how he was "chosen." "More than anyone, Jacob wanted, with every fibre of his being, to be chosen. He had wanted this from the time he was in the womb. He worked unceasingly at it. . . . To be chosen is to want to be chosen . . . God gives humans the desire that God wants to fulfill. For where did Jacob get this desire?" (Basset,140)

If Sainthood has to do with being chosen, and being chosen has to do with wanting to be chosen, then it seems that sainthood has to do with our HUNGER. Or to put it another way: sainthood has to do with how we respond to the possibility that we are chosen by God. Do we

care? Does it matter? What happens in our hearts when we let that sink in? What happens when we are walking/rolling down the street and let a voice speak to us by name and say: “ you are my chosen one.” Are we moved? Are we humbled? Richard Rohr talks about the people who came to Jesus, and were healed. Jesus commends them for their faith. What brought them to Jesus, other than their hunger?

If saint hood has to do with hunger, ...then it really turns our idea of saint as paragon of exemplary behaviour on its head. It's not so much about us, as in whom we trust, to whom we attach ourselves, and in what direction we grow. It has to do with letting something greater than our own ego, have a little influence in our lives. It has to do with qualities like humility, openheartedness and a willingness to surrender a little control. If this is what saint hood is about...then it turns our idea of saint on its head and lets a whole lot more people in!! The bible is always doing that: turning us and our ideas on their head and letting a whole lot more people in!!

The Beatitudes certainly do that.

When we listen to the Beatitudes ; what if we exchanged the words saintly-chosen for blessed?

Saintly/chosen are the poor in spirit = saintly are those who in their powerlessness rely on God. Saintly/chosen are those who mourn -----why? Because maybe when we mourn that's exactly when we create a little opening for God.

Saintly/chosen are the meek= who know their need for God.

Saintly/chosen are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness= hunger for peace, hunger for right relationship

Saintly/chosen are those who are merciful. We become merciful as we receive it; Those people who came to Jesus sought mercy, and received mercy

Saintly/chosen are those who are pure in heart. Pure in heart are those who know the one thing they need, and seek it.

Sainthood has to do with hunger, seeking, desiring, longing.

The question is: do we have the courage to live into that chosenness, and receive that blessedness?

If you look at that list of those we call saints from the Bible (Moses, Abraham, Peter) they were all pretty ordinary people; ordinary people who paid attention to a voice calling them and surrendered to something much bigger than themselves.

On this Sunday we are invited to think of ourselves as saints and invited to think of ourselves as part of a much larger community, one that includes, as well as those around us, those who have gone before us into death.

Step #1 in our apprenticeship in sainthood would be to recognize our need for others in faith, and give thanks. And so that is what we will do now.

I am sure we can all think of 1, or 2, or 3 or 4, or 5 people living still now, or who have died,

who have nurtured us in faith. We will give thanks for them, out loud, in something called “murmuring” prayer.

I invite you to simply say their names, in your normal speaking voice. If everyone in this room says a few names, there will be the gentle sound of murmuring around the room, sort of like a brook of water. It can be quite beautiful when a room of people murmur their prayers quietly, but out loud, all together.

Let us give thanks for the saints who have gone before us.

Offered to the congregation of MacNab St Presbyterian Church
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