

Shine, Jesus, Shine! -- Ephesians 1:11-23  
Saint Marks United Methodist Church, All Saints Sunday [November 3] 2013

<sup>11</sup> In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, <sup>12</sup> so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. <sup>13</sup> In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it: to the praise of his glory.

<sup>15</sup> For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, <sup>16</sup> I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, <sup>17</sup> that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, <sup>18</sup> having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, <sup>19</sup> and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might <sup>20</sup> that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Opal was a crusty old woman of Teutonic descent, who lived through the Great Deperssion of the 1930's and her basement showed it. Whenever staple items were on sale, she'd stock up, so she'd be ready for when she might not be able to get them. At one time, the count on rolls of toilet paper in her basement was 486.

And she was a PRUDE. She didn't like drinking and she didn't like smoking. And, although it was rare for her shadow to ever fall within the inside of a church, she didn't allow that to prevent her from occasionally "preaching" in short, terse statements of how people did not live up to the standards of "the good book," as she KNEW them to be true.

Across the street from Opal lived the widow Winona. Winona suffered from emphysema for at least the past ten years, requiring her to be on oxygen all the time. All the time – EXCEPT for when she took the cannula off her nose and smoked a cigarette, and then she'd put the oxygen back on.

Every night of the world, Opal cooked Winona's supper and sent it to her by Opal's husband or a visiting grandchild, who would also retrieve the supper dishes from the night before. Every night, without question, complaint, or comment. Never a word of judgment about ol' widow Winona, the smoking emphysema patient, who might at any moment blow up her house from lighting a cigarette too close to an open oxygen line.

It took me some time – well past the deaths of both Opal and Winona – to have the eyes of my heart enlightened – to see how the light of Christ shone through Opal.

That IS I believe, the best definition of a saint – someone through whom the light of Christ shines.

**Do you know an “Opal” in your life?**

I've heard some folks say that we ought not include people who are STILL LIVING in the list of saints we name

during this worship. But, NINE TIMES in this letter to the Church at Ephesus, Paul used the word “SAINT” (1:1, 15, 18; 2:19; 3:8, 18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18) and each time he used it in reference to those who are alive, not dead.

Too often, some folks miss seeing the saintliness of fellow companions on the journey, because the eyes of their heart have not yet been opened. This was Paul’s prayer for, and praise upon happening, the ENLIGHTENMENT OF THE EYES OF THEIR HEARTS – when they are able to **see and recognize** the saints; when they are able to **love the saints**. In so doing, Paul says, they **allow Jesus to fit all things together**.

**It’s not unnatural. Rabbits, bears, squirrels, puppies, kittens, and coyotes, among others in the animal kingdom are born with their eyes not open. It takes time and loving nurturance for the eye opening to occur.**

So, too, for pre-saints in the Church. But, then, **with loving nurturance**, their HEART EYES are opened, enlightened, and they are able to recognize the light of Christ shining through those around them.

All these banners surrounding us are signs and symbols

of what the Epistle to the Hebrews calls, **“The Great Cloud of Witnesses.”**

Almost 400 of them, since 1987. Over 25% have been added during my watch here as the resident Sheepdog over the past 11 All Saints Sundays.

And I’ve **yet to see** one of these folks, whose banners are here, who lived a life of perfection. But, oh!, how I’ve seen the light of Christ shine through them.

Sometimes, we get the notion that we’re supposed to BE PERFECT in order to be loved by God, and acceptable. Some folks think that means ***having all the right ideas***, the ***right thoughts***.

You know, ***if Jesus were all the concerned about his sisters and brothers having the right ideas, He probably would have written down a list of what they are.***

But that’s not how Jesus worked. He told stories instead, so that we could ***dance*** and ***disagree*** and ***play*** and ***quibble*** and ***generally learn some humility.***

**The important thing is the RELATIONSHIPS** – where the eyes of our heart are enlightened – and we can see the light of Christ that shines through the person sitting right

there in front of you, right there beside you.

- **THAT is when Jesus is able to fit all things together, all in all.**
- **THAT is the hope that we can all share.**
- **THAT is the glorious wealth to which we are all called.**

Look around you. For many of you, the names and symbols of lives lived on the banners are familiar and bring a smile to your heart.

Some of you are perhaps like I was, on my first All Saints Sunday. I came in to the sanctuary on Saturday night, after the banners had been hung. I saw names I was beginning to recognize. But there was only one banner, of anyone I had known personally – from back in my college days, when he and I served together on the Trustees at WV Wesleyan College.

But it did not matter. I looked around quietly, and I wept.

For I saw the great cloud of witnesses, through whom Christ's light had shown, and through whose lives this wonderful church, this powerful embassy of the Kingdom of

God, had been passed from one generation to the next. These were, and are, a bunch of **sinning saints**, and **saintly sinners**.

In our Hymnal, page 712, is the hymn ***I Sing a Song of the Saints of God***, where verse 3 stands out:

**They lived not only in ages past; there are hundreds of thousands still.**

**The world is bright with the joyous saints who love to do Jesus' will.**

**You can meet them in school, on the street, in the store,**

**In church, by the sea, in the house next door;**

**They are saints of God, whether rich or poor,**

**And I mean to be one too.**

The protagonist in ***Graham Greene's*** powerful book ***The Power and the Glory***, is the first literary usage of the term ***"Whiskey Priest."*** His life had exemplified many human weaknesses and frailties. He had fallen many times. But always he rose, amid all of the rumors and head wagging, and kept on going. The novel is set in the 1930's, when a paramilitary group, *The Red Shirts*, were systematically and terroristically eradicating the Catholic Church, in southern Mexico. And finally the old whiskey priest, with all his faults and flaws, was the last priest left, and came to the point

where he had to decide if he would hold onto the call God made on his life, even in the face of death, even though he had squandered away much of others' expectations of what his life SHOULD have been.

If you've never read it, I'll not spoil the plot for you. But each time I re-read the book, I am reminded of how God's light really does shine through God's saints, even when some folks simply aren't able, or don't want, to see it.

**You can meet them in school, on the street, in the store,  
In church, by the sea, in the house next door;  
They are saints of God, whether rich or poor,  
And I mean to be one too.**

My sisters and brothers, there is not one here – or anywhere – who has not fallen down. But there is also not a single person here today – nor anywhere – who is beyond God's love and grace, nor beyond God's ability to shine light through.

- Sometimes, we **have to let go of our certainties**, in order to see that light through **enlightened eyes of humility**.
- Sometimes, we **have to let go of our own feelings of woundedness**, in order to **allow that light to shine with**

*healing, where we nurture hurt feelings.*

- Sometimes, we *simply just have to let go* – *even when we are looking in the mirror* – to see that *they* and *we* are all *beloved children of God, precious and beautiful to behold.*

THEN – the eyes of our hearts WILL be enlightened – and we WILL see the light of Christ shining – in their lives and in our own. It's *not on the other side*; it's *right here in our very midst. It's called the Kingdom of God.*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.