

Preaching for Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, Reno, NV

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Date: November 5, 2023, Year A, All Saints Day

Text: Matthew 5:1-12

Title: Everyday Saints

Focus: Thanks be to God for everyday saints. A saint is one who is set apart by God and who encourages us in faith.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Who or What is a "Saint?"

It's All Saints Sunday. Let's talk about what the word or term means. **Who or what is a saint?**

- **Canonized saints**— We probably think first of famous people or well-known saints formally recognized or canonized by the Catholic Church for heroic virtue and evidence of a miracle performed. **St. Francis of Assisi**, for instance, known for his love of animals and all of God's creation. On St. Francis Day this year, we held a Blessing of the Animals service.
- **Everyday saints**--The Apostle Paul and others in scripture use the term *saint* to refer to all the believers or followers of Jesus in a particular community. When Paul writes a letter, he greets those believers in that place as *saints*. He uses the term to mean all the believers or all the faithful in that particular place.
- **Here's how Paul begins three different letters:**
 - "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, **called to be saints**, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2).

- “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, **to the saints who are in Ephesus** and are faithful in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:1).
- “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, **to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi**. . .” (Philippians 1:1)
- He greets the believers in a particular place as *saints*.

Saints, as in capital S Saints, can be known worldwide or across history. Saints as in small s saints may be well-known only to us. Small s saints are everyday saints who have nurtured us in faith. They are everyday people, both those living and those who have died, who have lived according to God’s purposes and therefore encourage us in faith. **On All Saints Day, we give thanks to God for the ordinary, holy lives of the believers in this and every age.**

- **Who is an everyday saint for whom you give thanks today?**
 - A mentor who has invested in you.
 - Someone who stood by you during a difficult time.
 - Someone who has led a group that was significant in your formation.
 - Advocated for you—stuck their neck out.
 - Parented or grand-parented you.
 - Prayed for you or walked with you in grief.
 - Embodied the values to which you aspire.

By their example, everyday saints embody what Jesus sought to teach us in parables or in today’s reading from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. Jesus is trying to help us imagine what life looks like when we live according to how God intends—which is so often counter to the cultural norms surrounding us.

Here’s a story of how an everyday saint can encourage us in holy living, told by a woman remembering the one who had been a saint to her by demonstrating uncommon kindness.¹

I was 18 years old. I was at the AM/PM gas station in Fairfield. My car was blowing up (not literally). It was smoking from under the hood. Apparently, you’re supposed to check fluids and, you know, get like oil changes...

It was late. Probably 10 p.m. I’m this young and dumb blonde completely confused on what to do...

This man (in his mid-40’s), rolled up in his truck, and asked, ‘What’s going on with your car?’

¹ Posted on Facebook at “Kindness is Free” on October 29, 2023.

I told him, 'I'm not sure, it's overheating.'

He asked, 'Are there fluids?'

I responded, 'Um, I don't know!'

He said, 'Didn't your dad ever teach you about how to check your fluids?'

I responded, 'No. I don't have one of those!'

He got out of his truck. This man... spent over an hour... He went over Car 101 with me...

Not only did he teach me how to *check* my fluids, but showed me how to *add* fluids. He then began to go over the basics with me – 'This is where your spare tire is. This is how you change a tire. This is how you crank your car up on this jack (that my car came with).'

He fixed my car, and I drove away that night with a car that wasn't overheating anymore. All right there in the AM/PM parking lot.

I know it sounds kind of silly... But he would show me how to do things and then say, 'Okay, now it's your turn – show me,' and then he would say things like, 'Look at you! You're doing a great job!' He was fun, and funny.

I drove away thinking, 'How cool would it be if he was my dad...?'

Anyways, I know it's 10 years later, and I've never told anyone that story... I wish I could remember his name.

In a strange/random way, you impacted my life, in such a positive way. Thank you.

You are the reason why I was able to give another young lady a Car 101 class...

Two days ago, I was at Chevron, and funny enough – it was like that day, all over again. The tables were turned... There was this young girl there whose car was smoking. I pulled up and asked, 'Are there fluids in the car?' [She was totally] confused. I showed her how. . .

I haven't thought much about that experience over the last 10 years. . . But it brought me back to that simple act of kindness.

Thank you, mystery man, for being my gas station parking lot dad, who taught me Car 101. My car has never run low on fluids ever since. **END**

Is this a Faith Story?

That may not sound like a faith story. Maybe it sounds like a kindness story and nothing more. But I think people of faith are called to exercise a holy imagination or a

holy discipline in which they follow the example of self-giving love which Jesus set by caring for others in such a way that they put others' need before their own.

This man exhibited that sort of kindness—which I think we could rightly call love. He spent what sounds like an exceptional amount of time to help someone who was overwhelmed. She, in turn, remembered the act of kindness or self-giving love, even if she didn't remember his name, and reciprocated the love herself when 10 years later she found another young woman in the same situation.

We've got plenty of examples in our culture of people using power and advantage for their own benefit to the detriment of others, whether we are talking about bullies on a school playground or in business settings or in global politics. We need more saints who exercise kindness and mercy and who work for what is right rather than forcing their own will on others.

Vera, an Everyday Saint

- **Who is an everyday saint to you?**

On Thursday of this coming week, we will gather in the sanctuary to give thanks for Vera Claar, an everyday saint from Good Shepherd.

Vera died in September at age 93. Because of health limitations, she wasn't active outside her home and there may not be too many Good Shepherd folks who know her. But she is an everyday saint whose story should be told as a sign of her vibrant faith lived out in specific, direct acts of kindness.

Insert photo of Vera and sock dolls



Here is Vera and here are the sock dolls she made. I had a conversation with Vera 2 years ago in which she told her faith story and the sock dolls as an expression of that faith.

“It’s just such a joy to make them. A lot of love goes into them. I try to visualize a child getting that and making them happy or comfortable. It blesses my heart.”

- She said this of the sock dolls that she made for children who had experienced a loss. Their school burned down in California wildfires.

Before that, Vera had been making blankets which were distributed to cancer patients, but during COVID, that program was halted, at least temporarily, and Vera was looking for a new way to express care for others in a tangible way.

That vibrancy of faith and that sense of purpose which she renewed each day—that's the story I want you to hear and be inspired by on All Saints Day.

She expressed that faith and that motivation herself: **"I ask God to keep giving me tasks until I take my last breath. . ."**

And, as it turned out, that prayer was very nearly true. She was actively working on projects and reaching out to others really until she was hospitalized about a month before she died.

This example of vital, faithful, meaningful living would be an impressive example for someone to provide at any age, but Vera displayed this into her 90s **and** while she was largely isolated at home because of health limitations.

Thanks be to God for Everyday Saints

Just this week, on what is traditionally called "All Hallow's Eve," or Halloween, the night before All Saints Day, another everyday saint from Good Shepherd, Pennie Kirk, left this earthly life.

In preceding weeks, we had been praying for Pennie (and for her husband Knute) during Sunday morning worship services because of her uncertain health. She had been in declining health and her condition had recently been specifically diagnosed, but still her death seemed so sudden.

First of all, let us embrace Knute in care and support. Secondly, let us remember and give thanks for those everyday saints who have touched our lives and nurtured us in faith.

Today on All Saints Sunday, we are providing you with a number of ways to remember and give thanks for an everyday saint who has touched your life:

- Displaying a photo or other memory on the table in the Welcome Space
- Naming them on an ornament to be displayed on the tree in the Welcome Space
- Lighting a candle here in worship for one who has died
- Naming them in your prayers of thanksgiving

- You could write a note or make a phone call to thank a living saint who has encouraged you. Don't waste an opportunity to thank someone and tell them you love them.

Thanks be to God for everyday saints, both living and those who have died, for touching our lives.