

WGUMC October 28, 2012 "Such is the company"
Psalm 24 and I Corinthians 1:1-7

Look around at all of us wonderful people. Every one of us a little bit saint and a little bit sinner. The only question for us is: which one did we bring to church today? Most of us try to bring our better selves. Now some will call us hypocrites for doing that. Some will note how much better behaved we are on Sunday than we are Monday through Saturday. But I don't call that hypocrisy. I call it humanity. Some of us are doing all we can to give our best to God for one hour a week. Maybe that's all we can manage right now.

So, do only holy people belong in God's holy place? Whenever I read Psalm 24, I think of the time when I was a little girl in Sioux City, Iowa. It was VBS, and a few of us were traipsing around in a very dark sanctuary. I snuck up into the chancel area and poked around the pulpit. But I felt like I was breaking and entering. I expected an alarm to go off or the God-police to show up.

"Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts...." Until that point, I may have had a pure heart, but when you're a kid, you almost never have clean hands. I was sure I was busted.

A lot of folks never come to church because they are afraid of the God-police showing up. But the question isn't "Are you pure and clean?" but "Are you going on to perfection?" That's what John Wesley would say. He didn't fault people for having dirty hands. He showed them the line for the sink. He didn't condemn folk for not having arrived at holiness. He just wanted to make sure that they were on their way.

We are not yet holy. But we can be made whole in Christ. That's what Paul says to the Corinthians at the beginning of his letter: "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints."

"Sanctified in Christ Jesus" means that for those of us who are in Christ—who love Jesus—Jesus will love all of the ungodliness out of us. The righteousness of Christ will rub out all the wrong in us. The holiness of Christ will plug up all the holes in our souls.

But if we're already sanctified, what does "called to be saints" mean? If Christ has already done all the work for us, what is there left to do? Here's the genius of John Wesley. Once we are "in Christ," we are grafted into his body, and we are drafted into his service.

The Army doesn't have a draft anymore, but Jesus does. And there are no deferments and no exemptions from that service requirement. But note that there are more than four branches of this service. Since Christ is the vine, all of us are branches. So there are as many ways to serve Christ as there are wanna-be saints in his church.

How do we do it? In the Roman Catholic Church there is a very formal process for recognizing saints, called canonization. You can't qualify for it until after you've died, and some miracles have to happen because people prayed to you. But the formal process of calling someone a saint isn't what the Bible means by "called to be saints." In the Hebrew Bible, "saints" usually means the whole people of God. And in the New Testament, it usually refers to all the members of the church, in other words, to us.

We are all called to be saints. And all of us have been helped by other saints who have taught us how to live and how to love. "Such is the company of those who seek the face of God." We could never become saints without them. And so we celebrate them on this All Saint's Sunday. I want to begin by recognizing a couple of our departed saints today, not just for who they were, but for who they enabled us to be.

In this past year, we said good-bye to a couple of very special saints, Kay Buell and Wayne Ritchie. Not only did Saint Kay serve Christ by loving children, but she taught others how to love them. She was not only instrumental in the building of our preschool, but she really showed us how to be a community that welcomes the ones to whom the kingdom of God belongs. The ministry that we are doing with children today would be inconceivable without her saintly service.

Likewise, Saint Wayne served Christ by keeping in contact with Christ's little ones, the least and the last among us. But he not only served for 26 years for CONTACT Crisis Line, he not only received their "Spirit of Contact" award and recognition by the Points of Light Foundation, he also shined his light on us. He showed us how to make real connections with people who need the love of God in their lives. Would we be doing hands-on, hearts-in service on every fifth Sunday, would we be starting up The Open Table ministry, without his witness among us? It's

like the movie, "It's a Wonderful Life." Just try to imagine what our lives would be like without these wonderful people.

Now I want to give you an opportunity to talk about the saints who have showed you how to live and how to love. And I challenge you to be very specific. *What* did you learn? *How* did you grow?

From Pat Farrow:

I would say that Grace Praisewater greeted me when I first visited WGUMC. We were searching for a church and we are particular about the beliefs that church represents. Grace welcomed me and asked what I was looking for in a church. She immediately told me about ways I could get involved.

This was important to me. I am really not too outgoing, so I needed to feel that I would be welcome here. I know it may be a simple thing, but I agree with Mr. Unger that our church is welcoming and that makes a big difference. Many others have included me and that has helped me grow in my belief that we are here to love each other and to be of service to them. All the opportunities like Disciple class, UMW, Building Hope the prayer and study group and volunteering at church have taught me that my life experiences have lead me to serve Jesus in all I do. It has given me purpose. Thanks to Grace.

From Ingrid Quigley's application for the Academy for Spiritual Formation. She wrote this just after Virginia Bogard died:

On August 22nd, just a few weeks ago, a dear friend, mentor and substitute mother died at the age of 78. I first met her when I joined Willow Glen United Methodist Church. Twenty years ago I came to this church, like many do, after 20+ year absence from any deliberate walk on the spiritual path. As I reflect on the passing of this spiritual friend, I'm most drawn to her gift of prophecy. I can't say I know many for whom I'd give this label, but she truly was a prophet. She spoke the truth as she saw it, and if those who listened looked deep in their hearts, most of the time they knew it was so. This did not always make for happy people, but she was truly compelled to speak up. Social justice was her passion. I valued her presence as a role model for holding onto God despite adversity and uncomfortable circumstances. I know her life was not easy, but she cared deeply about others. She could not understand why others were not compelled to action in the manner she was and why they weren't going deeper into their own spiritual journey.

I hold this friend in my memory as a model and reminder that I need to speak up and step up to further action. I know I'm not her, but I also know I need to continue my deliberate journey into understanding myself as the person God meant me to be; to understand why I am here and what I am called to do. While I feel I know a lot about myself, there's a lot more yet to do.

Not all saints are seniors. From Beth Minton:

I thought of Alexis Briski. She was barely 11 when she died. She spent the last year of her short life enduring one medical procedure after another and still she did not lose faith in God. I heard about her strength and strong faith second hand (through people like Susan and Lisa). Her example made me think about the strength of my own faith.

I want to close with an email from Heidi Barstow. She is a new member this year and has two children, a toddler and a teenager. She was recently in the hospital with a case of pneumonia that had spread into her bloodstream. She's home now and writes this:

I am feeling better each day, thank goodness for antibiotics and home bed rest...

This hospital stay scared me and put a lot of things in perspective for me - mainly that I have GOT to take the time to properly care for myself - physically, spiritually, mentally. Emotionally...

I am hopeful for the future and do see light in the darkness. In fact, one of the ways I've seen that is by people reaching out from church to say they care. In actions and words, not because they have to or because they feel they should - they just do. Doing what Jesus has called us to do and care for one another. Laura said this weekend's message is about saints in the

church. Boy oh boy did I experience many this week!

Last night the Ungers dropped off hot home-made bread straight out of the oven (I'm pretty sure that act sends one directly to the front of the Saint line) :) And in an hour Jane will be dropping off a meatloaf dinner. Laura has graciously, and unbeknownst to me until yesterday, started a meal sign up list and my family will have a steady stream of nourishment coming in for the next couple of weeks. This takes tremendous pressure off me as my body continues to heal. Rides for kids have been offered, errands have been run. All by a loving community of saints who truly care - some that know me well, and many that I have only recently met. I close my eyes and picture our congregation - our saints - and it is a beautiful picture. During all I'm going through, I rest well with that image.

Blessing, see you in a couple Sundays,
Heidi