

All Saints
November 2, 2014
St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
The Rev. Shari Young, Preacher

Story of feeling Dad's presence in office and turning to see photo

Most all of us have had experiences like this. People who have lost their partners of many years report feeling that somehow they are "there."

We think of the dead as having gone away to an unknown country far away, with very limited lines of communication.

But our experiences, like the ones that I have shared with you, that tell us that the boundary between life and death is much more amorphous and permeable.

Once a year, the church acknowledges and affirms that different view.

That is the reality that we highlight and celebrate today: All Saints Day and All Souls. The dead are here with us as we honor and remember them;

Christians refer to this community of the living and death as the "communion of saints." After this sermon when we say the Apostles' Creed together, we will affirm our belief in this "communion of saints:"

The communion of saints "*a spiritual fellowship existing among all faithful Christians, both living and dead.*"

" a mystical bond uniting both the living and the dead in a confirmed hope and love."

"The mystical bond" part of this can trouble some Protestants. However we understand the communion of saints, it is a promise of community among all believers both living and dead.

The Beatitudes are the gospel chosen for this All Saints Day. I have always had trouble with the Beatitudes; in books I used to prepare they are called the Magna Carta of the Kingdom, and Jesus is referred to "as the new Moses proclaiming the new revelation on a new Mt. Sinai." I just did not fully understand them and so I have spent a lot of time with them over the past week.

I have come to see that the Beatitudes frame the spiritual landscape where we live, together with those who have gone before.

I used to see each verse as a separate category of people, with the reward they would receive for their suffering or for their character.

I now put the emphasis on the the second half of each verse as the Garden in which we dwell right now, the blessed state in which we already live;

and the first half of the Beatitudes as the means by which our eyes are opened and our spiritual character awakened and shaped.

The Beatitudes describe where we live right now if we only have "eyes to see and ears to hear."

If you will permit me....in a paraphrased summary of the Beatitudes

We are “blessed,” joyful, and happy”.....

when we remember and invoke God in the ordinariness of living,

“ordinary life is the way”

when we live lives of goodness, generosity, integrity, humility, and non- aggression,

when our words, thoughts, and actions are compassionate, forgiving

and non-judgmental bringing peace and reconciliation

when we accept that each and every day can bring both painful challenges and breathtaking blessings;

that abundance and difficulty together grow our depth of character,

and bring us to deeper generosity, hospitality, and joy.

.....We are blessed, joyful, and happy when we accept God’s invitation to live spiritually in a material world.

We bless all those whom we remember today at this our celebration of All Saints and with whom we share a spiritual bond across time and space.

I especially bless my Dad for setting me off on this journey of faith.