

All Saints – No Exceptions
Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18, Ephesians 1: 11-23, Luke 6: 17-31
November 4, 2007

A young minister was asked by a funeral director to hold a graveside service for a homeless man, with no family or friends. The funeral was to be held at a cemetery way back in the country, and this man would be the first to be laid to rest there. As the young minister was not familiar with the backwoods area, he became lost; and being a typical man did not stop for directions. He finally arrived an hour late. He saw the backhoe and the crew, who were eating lunch, but the hearse was nowhere in sight. He apologized to the workers for his tardiness, and stepped to the side of the open grave, where he saw the vault lid already in place. He assured the workers he would not hold them up for long, but this was the proper thing to do. The workers gathered around, still eating their lunch. He poured out his heart and soul. As he preached the workers began to say "Amen," "Praise the Lord," and "Glory," He preached, and he preached, like he'd never preached before: from Genesis all the way to Revelation. He closed the lengthy service with a prayer and walked to his car. As he was opening the door and taking off his coat, he overheard one of the workers saying to another, "I ain't never seen anything like that before and I've been putting in septic tanks for twenty years."

Today is *All Saints Sunday*, a day in which we recognize those who have died in the past year and have been initiated into the church universal. Later in our service, during the Eucharistic prayer we will lift up the names of the thirteen saints of our local church body and the Bering Support Network who have died in the past year.

So what is a saint? That depends if you spell the name with an upper case "S" or with a lower case "s" and from which Christian tradition you have emerged. The Roman

Catholic tradition recognizes officially about 10,000 saints who have been canonized by the church. This tradition emerges from the earliest martyrs who have given their life for the faith. They are venerated as intercessories for the faithful. Their physical remains, that is relics, are especially preserved. Clearly sainthood in this sense is to be set apart by God on behalf of all the faithful. In the protestant tradition, however, we look at saints in the lower case “s” view. We look at the earliest witness in New Testament scripture from the Apostle Paul who refers to the early believers as “all saints.” For Paul we are all saints. You are a saint. Each of you was set aside by God in your baptism to be a holy priest. You share union with God and the faithful, both living and dead. At your baptism you have received the Holy Spirit and been initiated once and for all into a community of grace. You have been given an inheritance promised by God that is God’s watermark upon your life. The writer of Ephesians uses the word “panta” which means “all” four times in our Scripture lesson this morning: “all of the saints,” “all things under Christ’s feet,” “the one who fills all in all.” This is the spirit of inclusion filling our world in the spiritual realm. Jonathan Swift wrote, “We have just enough religion to hate, but not enough to love each other.” God adds; we subtract. God unites; we divide. Plato said, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” So also says Barclay, “the unexamined religion is not worth believing.” Jesus came to reconcile all of creation. All means all – panta means panta. We are all saints – no exceptions!

Reflect on the universality of that statement. Since the emergence of Homo Sapien Sapiens billions of people have been born and died. Billions have breathed the air that we breath, and have been given the breath of life by the loving Spirit of God. Think of the tragic conflicts that have killed millions of souls. Fifty-five million died in World

War II. It is estimated that up to one hundred million native Americans died either of disease brought by Northern Europeans who came to this country or in battles to protect their lands. What about them? Does all include all? Six billion people on our planet today who all will return to dust. Does all include all? Think about that as you consider your concept of God. I don't know, but I do profess this: I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation shall be able to separate God saints from the love of God in Christ Jesus.