

**Sunday, November 1, 2020**  
**Sermon: Calling All Saints and Sinners!**  
**Pastor Adam Ericksen**  
**Clackamas United Church of Christ**

Today is All Saints Sunday. I don't know how you feel about the word saint, but whenever I hear the word saint I think of real superheroes of the faith. Someone like Mother Teresa, or someone like Saint Francis. One of my favorites is Teresa of Ávila. While these saints can inspire me to try to do better in this world, they can also bring a sense of spiritual despair to my life because I am no Saint Francis. And I am no Saint Teresa of Calcutta or Saint Teresa of Ávila. We can get into this trap of comparing ourselves with other saints, so when I brought Amira up earlier in the service and said, 'here is one of my favorite saints,' Amira laughed. And of course, I would laugh too if somebody said that about me. I would be embarrassed. I would say to that person, as Amira was saying to me in her mind – 'you are wrong, stop it!'

There was this early Christian, I know many of you have heard of him, some people love him, some people hate him. Some people recognize he was flawed, just like all of us. His name was Paul. Paul wrote a bunch of letters to early churches in Christian history. He wrote two letters that we know of to a church in Corinth and to other places. I bring up Corinth because Paul starts many of his letters off to the saints in this town, to the saints in Corinth.

If he were to write today, he would write to the saints at Clackamas United Church of Christ, or to the saints at First Congregational United Church of Christ. Paul does this, I think, very intentionally because when he's writing to the saints in Corinth, it's important to realize that the church in Corinth was messed up. It was a church that was full of rivalry, full of conflict, full of scapegoating, full of all kinds of things that were not holy. The people there did not always act in ways that were saint-like and yet, Paul does not say to the saints at Corinth – 'I know some of you are saints and some of you are sinners and so, I'm just gonna write to the saints.' No, he doesn't say that. No, Paul is writing to everyone. And what he says to the saints, he's saying to the whole community. Even those who messed things up. Why does he do that? Because Paul is reminding the people in Corinth, and he reminds us of our true selves, that no matter what you have done, no matter what you have left undone, you are a saint in the church. Here's why. Because your saintliness does not depend on you. Your saintliness, you being a saint, depends on what God is doing in your life. Now, are we also sinners? I'm a sinner. As Paul also says in another letter – 'we all fall short of the glory of God, we all sin.'

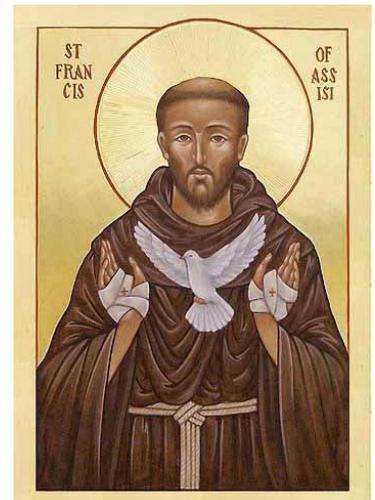
I'll tell you briefly about one of the saints in my life, and if I had called her a saint she would have acted just like Amira did when I mentioned her earlier. She would have laughed in your face, but this saint is exactly who Paul was talking about. Somebody just like me. Somebody just like you who has conflict inside of ourselves. Somebody who doesn't always act out the way that we should act out, but



*Saint Teresa of Calcutta*



*Saint Teresa of Ávila*



*Saint Francis of Assisi*

somebody who is trying to move forward in a better way. That person is my mother. My mother died when I was 20. She had cancer for about 10 years and my mother was a saint, although on any given day you might not have recognized that in her. My mother went to church. My family went to church because my dad basically had us go to church. My mother often had the mouth of a sailor. I remember she was on the phone one time and she dropped some words that she did not want me saying. But she said them when she was on the phone. I forget what the topic was, but I remember saying – ‘mom, you don't let me say those words!’ And she was like – ‘oh sorry, I'm sorry.’



*Adam & His Mom, Donna*

Sometimes as a parent, I do the exact same thing that my mom did in that moment. My mom was not perfect. My mom and I would go to church together. We would drive separately and we would go to the worship service. We would sit in the far back of the sanctuary so that after the sermon my mom and I could leave. In my church growing up, the sermon was towards the beginning, so we skipped out on most of everything else that was happening in the worship service. And that was awesome because she and I would go to Taco Bell afterwards and get some tacos. It was then that I discovered that you can meet God at church during a worship service, but you can also meet God at Taco Bell. God is gonna show up wherever God is gonna show up.

My mom was not overly religious. She was not overly spiritual. She had the mouth of a sailor, morally questionable at times just like all of us, and when she got cancer for the second time I went up to my mom and I asked her if she was ever afraid of death. What she said has stuck with me ever since. I must have been about 15 or 16 years old and my mom said – ‘no, I'm not afraid of death because I know my Jesus will save me.’ I know my Jesus will save me - that sounds very much not like my mom. Sounds like nothing my mom would have said, but there was something about her that led her into this space where she knew that not even death could separate her from the love of God. I don't know what it was. I wish I could ask her. I wish I could have that conversation. But she knew that life was worth living and she also knew that Jesus was present with her walking through this horrific experience of cancer.

That was the moment that I met the resurrected Jesus in my life from this woman who would never take communion (which we're about to do), she would never take communion because she told me her heart wasn't in the right place for communion. I don't know what that meant to her but I remember sitting there in church and she wouldn't get up for communion. She just sat there and when I asked her why she said – ‘because my heart isn't in the right place.’ And now, communion to me is not so much about your heart being in the right place. I wish I could tell her this, although I think that she knew it. Communion means that no matter what place your heart is in, God is God, and meets you where you are at. God loves you where you are at, and when my mom said that she couldn't go to communion because her heart wasn't in the right place that was earlier in her life. I think over time she knew this.

The most important lesson that I have learned is that this faith, this whatever you call it – Christianity, God, Jesus – whatever it is, what my mom taught me is that the fundamental reality of this universe does not love you because you are good enough, because you are moral enough, because you have

checked off all of the boxes that religion says you have to check off. God meets you where you are at and God loves you where you are at, and God invites us to love one another where we are at.

Jesus says in the gospel passage this morning that there are some religious leaders who are hypocrites. They say a lot of teachings, but they don't live them themselves. Maybe we have all been there, but what I think Jesus is getting at is that there are some religious people who look to laws, 'heavy burdens' Jesus calls them, and forces other people to live by these laws without living them themselves. Without having to live them themselves. Jesus says that my yoke is easy and my burden is light. If anybody comes to you and has a religious narrative, a religious message, that says you're not living into the law and so God doesn't love you. You can tell them that they're lying. That they are just like the hypocrites in Jesus' day, because when you use religion as a way to accuse others, to separate them from us, to say that we are better than you because we follow x y and z law, and you don't, then you're doing religion wrong.

Just before he has this passage, Jesus tells us that the most important commandments are to love God and love your neighbor. If you are using commandments or laws in a way that leads you away from loving God and loving your neighbor, then you're not doing Christianity right. You haven't met the resurrected Jesus. The saint in my life was a sinner. That's because all of us are a mixture of saint and sinner and all of us are loved. So friends, may we continue to work for a world where all people are treated with love and respect.

This election week, I don't know what's going to happen. I know there's a lot of anxiety. I have some anxieties about this week, but I want you to know that no matter what happens this Tuesday, on Wednesday we still have a mission. And that mission is to enter into a world where we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We love our black neighbors. We work for a world where there is no police brutality. We work for a world where Kevin Peterson, Jr., who was killed just this last week up here in Vancouver, Washington, is still alive today because we don't shoot people anymore. We work for a world of non-violence. We work for a world of justice. We work for a world where Jesus says to Christians – 'put your sword back in its place for all who live by the sword die by the sword.' We work for a world where we hear that today regarding our modern day weapons – 'put your gun back in its place for all who live by the gun die by the gun.' Let us work for a world where there are no more guns. Where there are no more weapons of war. Let us work for a world where we train one another to deal with conflicts in non-violent resolution. Let us work for a world where we take science seriously. Where we lift up



*Election Day at CUCC – Rhonda Frick-Wright, Shauna & Stephen Schroedl, Amira Stanley (Pastor Adam is offering prayers in the parking lot)*

experts who know what they're talking about and don't demean them. Let us work for a world where all people know that they are loved, where the houseless get housing, where everybody has healthcare (thank God my mom had a job that had healthcare, but not everybody does).

Friends, on Wednesday there will be work to do. Let us continue that work now and forevermore.  
Amen