

The Generosity of the Saints
Rev. Matt Landry
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SCRIPTURE READING

1 John 3: 16-24

¹⁶ We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷ How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

¹⁸ Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. ¹⁹ And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him ²⁰ whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. ²¹ Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; ²² and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

²³ And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. ²⁴ All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

"I expected to feel only empty and heartbroken after Paul died. It never occurred to me that you could love someone the same way after he was gone" wrote Dr. Lucy Kalanithi (Ka-lan-athi) in the book by her husband, Dr. Paul Kalanithi. His book, *When Breath Becomes Air*, was finished by Lucy, Paul's wife, because at the age of 36, Dr. Paul, a highly educated and successful neurosurgeon, was diagnosed with Stage IV lung cancer and died before his work was published. In his book, that is a memoir and invitation into the journey of life and death, Paul invites us into his journey in two parts. The first part is a story of growing into the role of a medical student who was succeeding in his studies and was about do amazing things with his education, who, as he writes, "was possessed by the question of what...makes a virtuous and meaningful life." The second part, a part of the journey he could have never imagined, was his answer to this question through his diagnosis and battle with cancer.

I first heard about this book on NPR, where Dr. Lucy was being interviewed. I quickly picked up the book and was taken by its writing and journey. It took me only two days to finish and I never finish a book in tears, but this book left me grieving, yet filled with a surprising hope. It may have been my own experience walking with people in life and death or feeling the immense grief of being with families as they said goodbye. Yet, in the midst of my own immense feelings of grief, I also felt a sense of gratitude for the lives lived, the love shared, and the opportunity I had to walk with them, both the saint and the family. In the last section of the book that Dr. Lucy finishes, she writes, "It never occurred to me that you could love someone the same way after he was gone, that I would continue to feel such love and gratitude alongside the terrible sorrow, the grief so heavy." Life can continue after we die in what we leave behind. Dr. Paul left not only a memoir for his baby girl and family, but he left us the gift of his journey.

This morning we gather on All Saints Sunday, where we are invited to remember, to give thanks, and to celebrate the saints who have gone before us in the last year and beyond. Some of us gather with fresh grief on our hearts, while for others, as we remember, we might have that wound opened once more that needs healing. It is my prayer that as we gather on such a significant day on the church calendar, that we will leave filled with joy and hope, giving thanks for those saints who have left a lasting impact on our lives. Do you ever have the sense that those who have gone before us are still here with you? All Saints is that day when we intentionally remember and proclaim that in Christ our love never ends; our love for God and our love for each other. When that love is there, it always remains, it never leaves, and it will always give us a connection to those who have lived and died in Christ Jesus.

Today we reclaim that love by speaking their names once more, but it's not just names that we remember, but the love they shared, their life energy, their charisma, their legacies, and their generosity in what they left us. The saints we remember today left us with a foundation, with their gifts, their teachings, their love, that stay with us to this day.

Over the last two months we have been looking at the pillars of joy outlined in the book by the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, *The Book of Joy*. I think it's appropriate that we wrap up this series on All Saints Sunday. What we remember most about the saints in our lives tends to be joy they lived their lives with. For both Pastor Steve and I, as we meet with families who are grieving the loss of loved ones, there are always stories that are filled with joy, thanksgiving, and great laughter in between the tears. There is healing found in the story telling and in the tears. In fact, just this week a few of us on staff recalled stories of those we remembered today. Jody shared some stories about Marsha Kuntz, our former Church Administrator who died in late December last year. We shared some of our sadness in those stories, but we certainly laughed too, at those times she was worried all night that church would burn down without the alarm being set, those nights she slept in her office, or the time she walked into my office in my first few months here and noticed my icons and crosses and asked if the pope lived in my office. I'm sure you could tell stories like this for every person who was remembered by name today.

What families remember the most is what their loved ones have left them with; those teachings and characteristics that made an impact on their family and friends. I can remember countless gatherings with families who shared story after story filled with gratitude and joy for what their loved ones left them. Perhaps the saints you remember today embodied humility, a great laugh and sense of humor, an acceptance of what life threw at them, a good attitude and perspective on life, a feeling of gratitude, a sense of compassion for others and themselves, and a spirit of generosity; all pillars of joy outlined in *The Book of Joy*.

Our two holy men, the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu, whose conversations make up this book, end the conversation with generosity as the final pillar of joy. If all of the pillars are in place and we begin to find joy, our next natural move is to generosity, to help others find joy as well. As it is stated in the book, generosity or giving can be a multitude of things. We can give of our time, our energy, and as it is taught in Buddhism, there are three kinds of giving: material giving, giving freedom from fear, and spiritual generosity. I believe these three kinds of giving are all found in the epistle, really the sermon of John.

In John's first letter, really a sermon, we note at the very beginning that we know love by this, that Jesus laid his life down for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. Isn't that the giving of freedom from fear in the sense of giving another person protection and counseling? I'm sure we can bring to mind a saint in our lives who always made us feel protected, loved, and secure. Maybe it was finding safety in the presence of a loved one. It could be that we have found in one of our saints a wise person who would always give sage advice and counsel. We find generous saints all around us who gave us freedom from fear and the freedom to live our lives in the way God intends for us to live.

John preaches to his congregation that we ought to share our material goods with a brother or sister in need. This is the example of material giving. I'm sure we know of those people who wouldn't let you leave their home without a sandwich for the road or a piece of pie as you talk. There are those saints who have given so much to the life of the church and other missions.

There were two brothers many years ago who shared a field and mill, each night dividing evenly the grain they had ground together during the day. One brother lived alone; the other had a wife and a large family. Now the single brother thought to himself one day, "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly. I have only myself to care for, but my brother has children to feed." So each night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary to see that he was never without. But the married brother said to himself one day, "It isn't really fair that we divide the grain evenly, because I have children to provide for me in my old age, but my brother has no one. What will he do in his old age?" So every night he secretly took some of his grain to his brother's granary. As a result, both of them always found their supply of grain mysteriously replenished each morning.

Then one night they met each other halfway between their two houses, suddenly realizing what had been happening, and embraced each other in love. The story is that God witnessed their meeting and proclaimed, "This is a holy place – a place of love – and here it is that my temple shall be built." And so it was. The holy place, where God is made known to people, is the place where human beings discover each other in love."

When we discover each other in love, we move to spiritual generosity. It's that sharing of spirit, our life energy that cannot be taken from us. Our spirits, entwined with the Spirit of Christ, leads to more life, not less. Spirit means more life, that's how the Spirit works; it draws you into greater life. Our challenge on this day is to remember, to give thanks, but it's also to reclaim those spirits who are here with us today, right now, in this very moment. They never left us. They're still with us today. Just as the Spirit of God is that wind that blows wherever it wants, our saints remain as the gentle breeze of peace and comfort. Our saints remain the as the strong wind in the "great cloud of witnesses" cheering us on in the journey of faith. Our saints remain as the gale force wind pushing us, guiding us, and encouraging us. There is an old Celtic saying that says, "Suddenly all my ancestors were behind me. "Be still" they said. "Watch and listen. You are the result of the love of thousands." "

They have left us with teachings, stories, and love and in doing so, they will never leave us. What is it that we want to leave behind? What will our legacies be? If we still feel the presence of our saints close to us, then they left something of themselves for us to treasure and hold deep in our

hearts. They lived generous lives; we're invited to do the same. We're invited to lay down our lives for one another. We're invited to be generous people.

We who believe in the name of Jesus the Christ are commanded to love, but what we sometimes forget is that in this love, we are never separated from God or our loved ones. "And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us," John writes. We are one in the Spirit of Christ. When we receive Holy Communion, we are in communion with Christ and all those who lived and died in Christ and we give thanks. Another name for this meal is Eucharist, which means "give thanks." As we come forward this morning, may we know that we are not alone, but that our saints are right here with us, encouraging us to find joy in generosity.

Let us pray: *Thank you God for all the saints in our lives who have given us so much in life and beyond death. For their lives, their love, their teaching, their joy, we give thanks. May we follow the example of all the saints and of your Son Jesus in living lives of generosity that in your love may never end. Amen.*