

Sunday November 3, 2024
All Saints Sunday

Meditation: “Holy Mystery”

In the course of our fall study group on spiritual practices we discussed many things. One of them was the eschatological banquet. We talked about the temple in Jerusalem and live sacrifices as a means of reconciliation between God and the people of God. The burning of the offal and the roasting of the meat was the preparation of a meal that God’s children were setting and inviting God to. The breaking of bread between two parties was, and is still in many parts of the world, a declaration of friendship and peace between the parties, a declaration of the desire to be reconciled of any differences that may exist between the parties.

The eschatological banquet is an awesome, bewildering, holy extension of that meal that people set for God. The eschatological banquet is the meal that God sets and invites all of God’s children to at the eschaton (or the end of history or time). In the feast at the end of history, God prepares the feast and does the inviting. No effort is required on our part. There is nothing we can do to earn or deserve an invitation, instead God lays out the groaning board and invites everyone to come and feast with God. Think about that the next time we break the bread and share the cup at communion on December 22, for the sacrament of Holy Communion, or the Eucharist, or the Lord’s Supper, call it what you will, prefigures, is a glimpse of the eschatological banquet. It is a hope-filled reminder of what is promised.

This eschatological banquet is what Isaiah is writing about in today’s lesson. The meal that God will prepare, the table that God will set and invite all of God’s children to come and feast at in the presence of God. If that doesn’t fill you with wonder and awe, I don’t know what will.

What things fill you with wonder and awe? (*a starry night sky, the northern lights, sunset over the lake, songbirds in spring, etc. etc. etc.*)

One of the things that fills me with awe and wonder is seeing photos of my grandson, especially photos of him with my daughter. The mystery of life and connection is a holy mystery. It is something there are no words or concepts to describe or explain. When I look at those photos, or on a video chat, the one, almost inexplicable, thing that I see is hope. I guess it is the hope of love, hope that love will conquer intolerance, hatred and greed and evil.

Yet as I think about the holy mystery of descendants, I also think about the holy mystery of those who have gone before. My own parents, and grandparents, and their ancestors before them, off into the mists of time. Were it not for them, we would not be here ourselves. Sure, they've done things that ought not to have been done. And, they've done more right than wrong, and it is the right that we do that identifies us as saints. I'm not talking about saints as in someone who has been formally canonized by the church. I'm talking about those people, and we all have them in our lives, who make the light of God known in our world and in our lives through their example. In fact, God calls us all to be saints, and at times we are – to someone. At other times – maybe not so much.

At the risk of missing someone, and taking a little liberty with the boundaries, I want to take a few minutes to talk about the saints in our church family who have died in the last year. As I finish talking about each saint, I'd invite their family to come forward and take a bulb to plant this fall in their memory.

Mary Margaret Kaiser, November 25, 2023

It should come as no surprise that Mary was a saint in Keith's life, and in the lives of their children and grandchildren. Amongst many other duties, she cooked countless great meals for them. But Mary was not content to be a saint just in the lives of her family. Mary was a saint to countless young people in her community. She was a saint to Brownies and 4-H members. She was a saint to the students she taught and encouraged to be the best they could be. She was a saint to softball players, and ringette players. Mary was a saint to the entire community because of the love and support she bestowed on their children.

The Rev. B. R. Bruce Scott, December 22, 2023

Where do I even start with Bruce's sainthood. As a minister, Bruce was a saint to congregants in Manitoba and several Ontario congregations. Like St. Mary, though, he wasn't content to just be a saint to those entrusted to his care. Bruce became a saint to people beyond his church families, and to people he would never even meet when he helped launch Agincourt Community Services Association, an organization I worked for briefly prior to my own ordination, and building homes for families in Haiti. Bruce's work did, and still does touch the lives of many, including the marginalized and vulnerable in Scarborough, Ontario.

The Rev. Lewis Snow, December 28, 2023

I can't think of a more likely place for a saint to come from than from Newfoundland. Lewis' knack for spinning a tale or telling a joke was known far and wide. But that isn't what made Lewis a saint, nor was it his impersonation of St. Nick. The thing that made Lewis a saint was his pastoral sensitivity. Lewis could never say no to someone who needed a listening ear and a gracious heart. In this way, Lewis was a saint to countless people in his life.

John (Jack) George Lorimer, January 2, 2024

Like St. Lewis, Jack hailed from the east coast.... Only it was Nova Scotia, not Newfoundland. Like the others, I'm sure that Jack was loved and adored by his family. Even Tiger may have condescended to admitting that Jack was a saint, and that's saying a lot for a cat. But the places where Jack shone God's light into this world was through his work as a Shriner, as a Boy Scout leader, a school board trustee, and a municipal councillor. His service to his community, and in particular, to the youth of his community was, well, saintly.

David Scott Woods, February 15, 2024

Here's where things get a little trickier. I didn't preside over David's service, so I didn't have the opportunity to collect stories from David's family. I did, however, learn a few things about David that I believe qualify as saintly. Undoubtedly David's four daughters loved and adored him, yet there was more to David's life than his daughters. David was a kind, loyal and compassionate friend. He had St. Lewis' listening ear for friends in need. But it was his concern for helping his fellow farmers that really stands out. David shared farming wisdom with other farmers to help them improve their practices, and their yields, and their lives. And, as chair of the Ontario Bean Board David was insistent that money be spent not on perks for a few members, but on research that would help improve crops for all.

Kenneth (Ken) William Purdon, May 4, 2024

Ken was a saint in Rhea's life. Ken was a saint in the life of many who met with him around the euchre table, across the cribbage board, or at a music event at Purple Hills. There people became aware of the joy of God's blessing in Ken's joy. But it was likely his grandchildren who most saw Ken as a saint in the little things that he did for them, like running fresh baked goodies down to the school bus stop for them to take to school – a sign of God's presence in their daily lives, even in the seemingly insignificant details.

Harold Allan Weir, June 19, 2024

Allan was a saint in the life of his wife, Gail, and their children, Bill and Matt. Allan, like St. Jack, was, possibly, a saint in the lives of the barn cats who adored him, but I'm reasonably certain that the family dog did not see Allan as a saint. And, like St. Ken, I think it was his grandchildren who most saw Allan as a saint. He was a sign of God's constant presence in their lives as he attended every hockey game that they played in.

Patricia (Pat) Ann Leeuwestein, August 12, 2024

Pat was a saint who loved order over chaos. If Pat wasn't creating order where there was chaos, she was busy organizing someone in the midst of their own chaos. Pat was not only a saint to her husband, Hans, and her children, Beth and Cheryl, but, like St. Mary, was a saint to the children she taught, both as a teacher and as a Girl Guide leader. Many children came to learn of God's love for them as witnessed to by the love that Pat showed them.

Dr. William (Bill) Duncan Greason, September 27, 2024

I didn't know Bill well, or for long. Neither did I preside at a service to commemorate his life, so the research is thin. And yet, it doesn't take a lot of searching to discover the Godly aspects of the life of some people. Bill was a saint in the lives of his family: his wife, Sandra, his daughters, Tamera and Ashleigh, and his granddaughter Mary Jane. They knew him as a loyal and loving person – both attributes of God. Another attribute of God that Bill possessed and shared was his sense of humour. Bill was also a saint to many beyond his family. Like St. Mary and St. Pat, Bill was a teacher who sought to bring out the best in his students. Bill was also a saint to his community through his work with the Freemasons, with Fanshawe Pioneer Village, and right here as the chair of the trustees of this church.

Marjorie Kivell, October 21, 2024

Marjorie died a little less than two weeks ago, and we have not yet even held a service to celebrate her life and say goodbye to her. In fact, I haven't had the opportunity to sit with the family yet and hear the story of her life, from their perspective. Yet, there is a little something that I do know. Marjorie was a quiet saint. She wasn't one of those saints out on the front line. Marjorie was an enabler saint. Marjorie's husband, Fred, was the one who served his community and his church in many ways. Marjorie was the quiet, supporting saint who worked behind the scenes to make that all possible. Without Marjorie, Fred's work would have been impossible. Marjorie's way of supporting her community was by supporting Fred and his work in the community.

Gordon (Gord) Francis Lewis, October 22, 2024

Like St. Marjorie, Gord died a little less than two weeks ago. His loss is still fresh in our hearts and in our memories. Yes, Gord, like all of the others we've mentioned this morning, was a saint in the life of his family. There were two key lessons that his family learned from him. The first was to work hard. That seems like a saintly lesson. Justice and peace are not easily achieved but come only through sustained hard work. The second lesson was to be kind. Chesed, the Hebrew word that is translated as loving-kindness, is about the loving-kindness between people, and is about the loving-kindness that God showers on Creation. In those two lessons Gord is a saint to all who would listen.

It dawns on me that, for many, their saintliness was related to their service beyond the bounds of their own family, but that wasn't a requirement for being thought a saint. The thing that was really necessary to be thought a saint was to reveal something of the nature of God through their life. May we look carefully at those we share life with, recognize the ways they reveal something of God to us, and acknowledge that while they are still here with us. Amen.