

## **"Through the Stained Glass" IV – "It's Your Day!"**

November 1-2, 2014 All Saints Day and Communion Sunday

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Hebrews 10:1-25

### **Introduction**

It is great being back from my mission trip. My trip began in Cyprus where I taught at a retreat for some pastors from Lebanon, Egypt and Cyprus. Upon arrival I was surprised and actually frightened to discover that I was expected to rent a car and drive 1 1/2 hours to our retreat center. I know this doesn't sound like a big deal, but when you've never driven a car that has the steering wheel on the wrong side of the car, and been forced to drive on the wrong side of the road while negotiating winding mountain roads, freeways and dense traffic through cities -- trust me, it will test your nerves and is rather dangerous. My prayer life kicked into full gear immediately. Upon arrival at the mountain retreat center I was taken to a small hotel where they had a room for me. I was given a key and went to the hotel after our first session. It was 10 p.m., pitch black at night, quite cold and the hotel was empty. All the lights were out. There wasn't a single guest there. There were no staff or caretakers. The place was severely dilapidated. In fact, I found out later, it only had three rooms that were functional, and their functionality was questionable. It was a lonely contrast to the joyful retreat I had just left with its singing, hugs, delicious food and warm fellowship. I had a feeling I was staying on set from a horror movie. Although we all need a break from people from time to time, we were not created to live "alone". In fact, part of being human is the fact that we need each other. It's good to be in fellowship. The most spiritually mature person will struggle in isolation. God said, "It's not good for man to be alone". We are social creatures, created to live in community.

Yet fear, sin, insecurity, culture, and shame – all drive powerful wedges between us. They divide us, isolate us and disillusion us.

If we are going to live life at our best, we must discover God's ways of living life in its proper order - in community as life-giving, united, growing people.

Why talk about this today? Well first of all, this is "communion Sunday" where we focus on community and the thing that we have in common. It is also "All Saints Day" which ties into communion. We're experiencing the "communion of the saints". All Saints Day is an occasion that is being observed by the Catholic and Orthodox Churches this weekend as they remember the heroes of their faith.

**"Saints": Definition - 'holy ones'**. We tend to view saints as an elite group of people who are ultra godly, super spiritual and other worldly.

This is not the Biblical concepts of what a saint is. In the New Testament it is used to describe Christians in general. 1 Corinthians 1:2 "...to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours." "He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace." - 2 Timothy 1:9

That is what a saint is.

If you have received Jesus Christ as your Lord, you are called (to be) a saint.

I know that you and I don't act or feel like saints all of the time. A Duke University professor did a fascinating study that shows our propensity towards sin. He noticed that at the end of every semester, when final projects were due, there seemed to be a rash of deaths among student's relatives. Usually it was "Grandma" who died and made it necessary for students to turn in their work late. Research was done on this tendency and it was discovered that grandmothers are ten times more likely to die before a midterm and 19 times more likely to die before final exams. Grandmothers of students who are not doing well in class are at an even higher risk. Failing students are 50 times more likely to lose their grandma than non failing students. So if you are a grandparents, don't let your grandchild go to college especially if they are scholastically challenged.

Who hasn't been tempted to make up an excuse that really wasn't 100% true? The bottom line is that we are sinners who have been called saints by God. All Saints Day is your day!

Perhaps you have heard another "stained glass" phrase: *The Communion of the Saints*. "I believe in the communion of the saints" is a term found and quoted in the Apostle's Creed, which was written in 390 AD by Ambrose. It wasn't written by the Apostle's but was intended to be a summary of their teachings.

The Communion of the Saints refers to something amazing that you and I should enjoy every day and every moment of our life. –

Communion with God and with each other.

It is communion Sunday, and it is All Saints Day, so let's finalize our glossary for today:

"Communion": Definition: The Latin translation of the Greek word *koinonia*, which is translated in English as "fellowship"

Fellowship/Communion means to share what we have in common. Our common faith makes us part of a common family. As brothers and sisters in Christ we are family. For most of our adult life Heidi and I have not lived in the same city as our parents or our extended family. This creates some sorrow on the one hand, but on the other hand we always had the family of God. We have had brothers and sisters, grandparents and children, aunts and uncles in the Lord from whom we have received the same benefits that family would have provided if they had been around. We are called to live life together with each other. We share each other's burdens. We encourage each other. We help each other grow.

When I was in India, on the very last day of my recent mission trip, we had a "mass wedding". No, we didn't do a wedding mass. We did a massive wedding by marrying 15 couples (describe). It ended up being a short ceremony -- only 5 hours long. In that culture the festivities can go on for days. (Describe the clothes and what they did). 3000 people were there for the weddings.

The church provided the food, the gifts and the entertainment. The fellowship of believers made the occasion a much greater celebration. It was a high class (high caste) affair.

Read quickly Hebrews 10:1-18, w/ some commentary

Vss. 19-25

I. Vss. 19-21 (A summary of vss. 1-8)

<sup>19</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, <sup>20</sup>by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, <sup>21</sup>and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

Here is some great news!: Here are some wonderful things we know about God:

- A saint has an all access pass to God because of Jesus...therefore...: (insert story of a child gaining access to the President) No appointment necessary. Don't have to go through a

secretary.



“All access”. Free access.

What curtain? In the tabernacle, it was a divider that kept everyone except for the high priest, from the Holy Place. We are called saints because of His sacrifice (His broken body) the curtain is torn.

Because we have a “great priest” – He is the BEST! He loves us and takes us in. All things become possible!

II. Vs. 22

<sup>22</sup> let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that *faith* brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

So what then? What is our responsibility, since we are given so many wonderful blessings?

1. Saints draw near to God

- a. **With sincerity** - Be real. Not faking it. A very important quality. Sincerity of heart. No pretending in prayer. Why do people sometime pretend to be religious? When do we fall into that trap?
- b. **Without shame** – Confidence that comes from cleanliness.

(Tell the story here of the pastor from India -- *I met a terrorist while I was in India. I preached in his church. He isn't a terrorist any longer, but before becoming a Christian he...Now his goal is to...He is like a modern Apostle Paul*).

We have it so easy. It's easy to play religion here in America, where it seems like nothing is really at stake. Not like the woman I met in India whose husband had just been killed. Not like the...

But for us, much is at stake. More than we realize. In fact, all that we have and all that we are is at stake.

Let us be examples through our generosity, through our optimism, our love, our encouragement and our faithfulness.

III. Vs. 23

<sup>23</sup> Let us hold unswervingly to the *hope* we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

## 2. Saints “hold onto hope”

Something is pulling you away from hope. What are you dealing with right now, that has your hope lessening? For some here, it is your marriage...for some here, it is son...finances. Keep your grip strong. As saints, we are called to be the most positive people - not by living in denial, but by setting our hearts on the real hope that comes from a faithful God. (rope swing). While in Cyprus I met a pastor named Said Deeb, who lives in Beirut. He has been pastoring there for many years and has seen persecution against Christian escalating. Five years ago...Switzerland. Felt like he should stay...what has taken place is remarkable...given a building...grown from 30 to 3000+ in just a few years. Hold onto hope when things get tough.

IV. Vs. 24

<sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward *love* and good deeds,

3. **Saints encourage others** – This is a good command. Here is where we get our focus off ourselves and onto others. Not flattery. Flattery is...vs. encouragement is...

Do you go around encouraging people? How can/do we push others along towards love and good works? How have others done that for you in the past? There are people who have taught me and encouraged me to be a more loving husband/father and pastor. They have done so by their example and by their words. Who can you encourage? How can you encourage?

You don't have to have an inspiring speech to encourage others. Listening well and saying a few words seems to be the most effective way to do this.

One of the best ways to motivate others towards love and good deeds is to be an example of love and good deeds. While in New Dehli I met a man who was disturbed to see so many children on the streets of his city...1 became 10. 10 became 20. Now he has 33 daughters. All of them come from some sort of traumatic situation. Slumdog Millionaire is not fiction. It is a true story for thousands of children in India. The government is asking him to open a home for boys.

In this passage we see faith (vs. 22), hope (vs. 23) and love (vs. 24) all working together.

V. Vs. 25

<sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

**4. Saints hang out together!** This is kind of a warning – We need each other. Don't isolate. Don't disconnect.

Some have taken a very narrow interpretation of this verse to tell people - You better get to church! You better start attending more regularly. Maybe you do, and if you do, then respond to that but this verse doesn't exactly say that. It is speaking more broadly against the temptation to isolate.

In isolation, sin grows. It grows in the dark. When my friends have "fallen" I have discovered that it happened when they pulled away. When they isolated.

When we face that temptation or any temptation, lean into each other.

The communion of the saints is hanging out together. We have "communion" – with God and by being with each other. After starting my trip "isolated" at the lonely hotel in Cypress, I enjoyed fellowship/communion with roommates during the rest of the trip. running w john If you cannot stand to be with other people, get some counseling and figure out what needs to be healed in you.

It's not that you need everyone (although I think you really do), but they need you. You have something no one else has. Something to offer. Something to do.

**Main point:** Today is all saints day. **It's your time to live like a saint.** Let God's view of you shape your self-perception and your behavior. Part of living like a saint is living in community.

Draw together:

How? Men's Retreat, make time for people, join a small group.

Conclusion: Communion. How we can do this as an application of the message?  
We begin with communion with God.

We receive His holiness.

We "share" communion with someone else.

**Serve and Administer Communion**

**Prayer groups**

Benediction:

Hebrews 13:20-21

Next week: Honoring our Vets and guest missionaries from Thailand.