

Sermon November 3, 2019
Paul Purdue preaching

From Other's Hands - November 3, 2019 All Saints Sunday

13 rusted speciality drill bits (masonry)
7 water stained photos in lacquered antique frames
2 100 year old wooden trunks, which now look like they washed ashore
Not even one room's hardwood floors survived the ruptured water line's flood...
Soaked, buckled, removed and tossed into a big blue dumpster.

Last week, Connie and I unpacked boxes that Servepro had stacked in my parent's garage. We laid items on the driveway for photos and entered each one's value into a spreadsheet entitled "the Estate of Joann Purdue". Can you contain life's value on a spreadsheet? Amid the ruins, I felt Jesus' words like a deep arthritic ache, "watch out...one's life isn't determined by possessions" (Luke 12:15). The value of "eight speciality drill bits (wood)" appears in peace found creating something inside my workshop. I thank my dad for lessons in retreating to a sawdust sanctuary. There is no monetary value in a shoebox of damp photos marked "1972", and yet a residual blessing flows from memories worth saving: cousins in Easter fashion groovy yellows, powder blue pantsuits, and maroon bell bottom pants with matching ties.

Spreadsheets can not measure our sacred worth. Life is not transactional. Today, we remember people. We remember that God made us with infinite worth. Today we celebrate that life is a gift from God. Let us "fan the flame of God's gift that is in each of us... remembering that God didn't give us a spirit that is timid but one that is powerful, loving, and self-controlled." Humanity is made with bits of holy stuff - the very breath of God kisses us. God counts the hairs on your head. We are just a little less than the angels but I wonder if our imperfections make us more lovely than the heavenly host? From inside prison, Paul tells us how to face life's suffering: do not be timid or afraid, because God has gifted us with a spirit of power, agency, advocacy, art and ability. You are the light of the world, no one lights a lamp and hides it under a bushel basket, no, they put it on a map stand for all to see (Matthew 5). Find your power, live with love, and have self-discipline or "sound-thinking".

I think All Saints speaks of presence of God in human lives, a kind of incarnation. We see God through others' love, power and sound thinking. Hear Paul's tenderness as he writes Timothy even amid the sadness of prison and separation, "I'm grateful to God as I constantly remember you in my prayers. When I remember your tears, I long to see you so that I can be filled with happiness. I'm reminded of your authentic faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice. I'm sure that this faith is also inside you. Revive God's gift that is in you. Remember, God gave us a spirit that is powerful, loving, and self-controlled."

- What has God given you through other's hands?
- Which teacher helped you find your gifts?

- When did a friend help you find your worth?
- Surely, you did not write your favorite poem, song, or book?
- Did any of us build this sanctuary or fill this hymnal?
- Did anyone here sew their favorite dress or pick their own coffee beans?

I love the image of God telling Abraham and Sarah to go out and count the stars... each star a descendant, our ancestor. Jesus elevates our human worth, "You are a city on a hill, shining hope with each good deed." The best Biblical images for God are love and of light. Science tells us that light particles and waves can travel away its source for an eternity. The oldest light being over 13 billion years old. Indeed, light bounces around until it is absorbed. In the same fashion, the Apostle Paul tells us that love never ends flowing from its source across the universe. Jesus says even sharing of a cup of water with a thirsty stranger never loses its reward. Love, like light, ripples across the universe leaving residual blessings to those who do not even know the source of the blessings. Who discovered the medicine that keeps my disease at bay? Who manufactured that airbag that kept us safe? Who wrote that song? What craftsperson installed the stained glass window? Who all paved the road we walk?

Today, let us pause and remember all the light and love that flows from God through human hands, hearts and voices. Even as we pray through tears, longing to rejoin friends, let us celebrate the good gifts of God given to us by others' hands. Let us celebrate others' sacred worth. We are not alone; the saints surround us and go before us.

Let us lift up the good gift of grandmothers, mothers, sisters, spouses, surgeons, scientists, poets, playwrights, philosophers, and friends who, even when separated from us, enrich our lives, whose love and light enriched our living:

Grandmother Eunice
 Mother Lois
 Dear Timothy
 Mother Susanna Wesley
 Prophet Martin Luther King, Jr.
 Poet Mary Olliver
 Nobel Prize winner, who studied light, Roy J. Glauber
 Theologian Rachel Held Evans
 Pioneer Aviator Missionary Geraldyn "Jerrie" Cobb

So today, if separation aches deep in your bones and you pray through tears, remember the good gift of this life. Remember God kissed our lives with sacred worth. Remember how the residual blessings flow. Revive God's gift that is in you. Shine love. Offer light. And let us not be afraid or timid, but live with a spirit of power, love and self-discipline. Amen.