

All Saints Day November 6, 2011

Margie Mayson

Back when it all began, it was simple enough. Disciples gathered together, in homes, in courtyards, in upper rooms and shared stories... At least that's how the scriptures paint it. "Remember the time Jesus was speaking before a crowd and he healed all those who were lame?" "Remember when that blind man called out to him and he spat in the mud and made a compound and put it on his eyes and he could see again?" "Remember when a woman reached out in a crowd and touched him and he knew and she was healed?" "Remember those stories he told...about a prodigal son, about searching for a lost coin..." "Oh, remember how much he did..." "Remember how he said to remember him..."

Like some today, they believed that he would return soon and they had good reason to believe it because they remembered him saying things like, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power." Or when after speaking about things that would happen at the end of time, he said, "I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place." They thought Jesus would return soon and when you think that time is short it is easy to act on your best impulses and with deep courage and commitment. They could be bold and brave, because they had each other. So they put Jesus' words into actions. They fed the hungry and gave drink to the thirsty. They welcomed strangers. They clothed the naked. They visited the sick and those in prison and their numbers grew....

It makes you think doesn't it? If you knew you had only a small amount of time left to live, would you waste a minute of it? Here is the reality—you do only have a small amount of time left to live. You have a terminal condition called mortality, and you have only a matter of years left to live. So live now while you have time. Make the most of every waking moment. I'm like the doctor calling you to his office to deliver news of your certain death. The diagnosis? Mortality! An unexpected illness might take you sooner than later, but one way or another death will visit. Be prepared for death, not by fretting over the afterlife but by shining all the light you have to shine while you are alive.

It's amazing what the news of death can do to a person. There's an episode of the TV show *House* where Wilson wrongly diagnoses a man with terminal cancer. He later realizes his mistake and calls the man in to explain. He expects the man to be elated, but finds instead that he is devastated. When he

found out he was going to die the man discovered an incredible zest for life. And now he wants to sue the hospital for ruining the urgent enjoyment of life that can only come from knowing that your death is imminent.

Anyway to get back to the early church, time passed, and while their actions remained strong and true, things began to shift ever so slightly. Organization had to be implemented, leaders elected—and questions emerged. While they were waiting for Jesus to return, they had to face the hard realities of life...some of them were aging and began to die; and death is never easy. Some, no doubt, even died young, of disease or by accident. And so the church couldn't help but wonder...wonder why Jesus didn't return, wonder what God's plans were for their loved ones. So Paul, still trusting the way of Christ, wrestled with the early church's questions and wrote to the church at Thessalonika the words you heard this morning... [I Thessalonians 4:13-15, 18]

“But we do not want you to be uninformed brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do, who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpets, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together, with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

It is important to note what Paul did not tell the Thessalonians. He did not say that it was God's will that their friends had died. He did not say that they should be happy that their loved ones were now in a better place. He did not tell them that they would not grieve if they just had enough faith. What he did say is, “we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do *who have no hope...*” Faith would not shield them from grief, and faith does not and will not shield us from grief. But faith does offer a different perspective—a perspective that grieves *with* hope. “For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.” While we don't fully understand exactly what that

means, we know that Paul means that just as Jesus rose from the dead, so God will raise us to be with God.

And so as we come to celebrate All Saints day here at St. Paul's I am reminded of something Walter Bruggemann once wrote about saints...

...we mean men and women, boys and girls, who love the Lord and who live lives that show it. To be sure, in this congregation, like every other congregation, some have been not so saintly, and occasionally even the saints act in less than saintly ways. Nonetheless, by speaking of the communion of saints, we confess,

- 1. that our dead who have died in faith are safely with God,*
- 2. that we who live in the church are deeply connected not only to our Lord, but to our loved ones who lived and died in the Lord.*

This year we lost 10 members of our church family. Were they saints? Yes, in that they professed their faith in God and took the step of joining us for part of their journey as they were able.

Manning Bud Woolley died on November 18, 2010 at age 101. Manning worked on the church sound system many years ago. He and his wife faithfully worked with the team to fold the newsletters.

Frank Mazurek died December 31, 2010. He was an active member of the choir and willingly shared his musical talent as a violinist with us as special music.

Michael Lackner died on February 15, 2011. He faithfully attended worship with his partner.

Ben Richards died on February 22, 2011. Ben attended worship and our Older Adult Ministry functions as long as he was able. When he was no longer able to attend, he enjoyed sharing the sermon notes that his visitors from the church brought him.

Dr. Lee Sprinkle died on May 18, 2011. Lee was always very appreciative of the attention he received from us and enjoyed visiting with those who delivered the plants at Christmas and Easter.

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Marian Forester died on June 13, 2011. Marian faithfully attended worship while she was able and enjoyed our visits when she was no longer able to be in worship.

Jane Riggs died on July 3, 2011. Jane was a music teacher and Frank Mazurek had mentioned how helpful she had been when he first came to teach at Ithaca HS. She always wrote the loveliest thank you's for the cards and plants she received from us.

Beverly Agard died on July 27, 2011. Beverly took part in several of our Older Adult Ministry functions and enjoyed the visits from our care team.

Don Cameron died on August 2, 2011. Don was very faithful in worship here and in Bible Study at Longview. His sense of humor was great. If you asked him how he was he always replied, "Too blessed to be stressed!"

Millie Johnson died on September 6, 2011. During her life, Millie helped many women who had no place to go. By taking them under her wing, she helped them get a new start. She had the most beautiful smile when we would go to see her.

Shortly we will celebrate the gift and sacrament of Holy Communion. As we recall the story through the liturgy we are reminded again, that as we remember, we are reconnected to Christ and all who have ever gathered around the table....that our gathering now is but a foretaste, a dress rehearsal of what the heavenly banquet will one day be when we are all gathered together in the presence of God. Our loved ones, be they members of this church or of our families, will be healed and every tear shall be dried. But maybe today, it is okay to be sad. Christian faith takes death seriously in that we do not pretend that it does not mean deep loss or profound sadness. But it does say that death does not have the last word. Even the simple act of saying aloud the names of those who have died is a start in ensuring that death does not get the final word. We anticipate a heavenly reunion, but for now we sing,

O blest communion, fellowship divine,

We feebly struggle, they in glory shine.

Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine,

Alleluia...alleluia....alleluia. Amen. ["For All the Saints", #711 *The United Methodist Hymnal*]

St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Ithaca, NY; The Rev. Margie Mayson; November 6, 2011 4