

St. James' Episcopal Church Cindy Baskin  
All Saints Sunday, Year C - **8 & 11 am Text** November 6, 2010  
Text: Dn 7:1-3, 15-18; Ps 149; Eph 1:11-23; Lk 6:20-31

**Thesis:** Faithful Living, Faithful Stewardship as a Saint of God  
**Scripture:**

### **Introduction – A Memorable Sermon**

Have you ever heard a sermon that has stuck with you in some, memorable way? I have.

### **Brother Friend's Revival Sermon**

At this time of year back in 1967 when I was a senior in college, some friends of mine and I decided to attend a revival in a small, clapboard church that wasn't much larger than our south transept. This was an Assembly of God church and we Lutheran college kids were very curious: curious about the Pentecostals, about whom we knew nothing, and very curious about the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, like speaking in tongues. We were hoping we'd see some of that!

So down we went one evening to a midweek revival service at which a guest preacher and traveling evangelist was the speaker. Brother Friend was, I suspect, a man in his fifties or early sixties, which means, he's probably now part of that greater Communion of Saints which we celebrate today (as this was 43 years ago).

The revival sermon he preached was titled, "*Do These Five Things and You Will Never Backslide.*" He spoke about five spiritual disciplines, quoting scripture in support of each, and illustrating with stories about people, for whom practicing a particular discipline had made a difference. Afterward, I asked Brother Friend if I could have a copy of his sermon, and he gave me his original manuscript (*hold up*) – a simple one-page outline, which I have kept in my own bible ever since. Why and how did that particular sermon have such impact on me? Because several years later I began practicing one of those disciplines about which he spoke.

Four of his five points are things reflected in the promises of the baptismal covenant (which we will celebrate at the 9:15 am service today) – things we've all heard repeatedly as ways to grow as a disciple of Jesus: *Secret Prayer Daily*; *Read and Study Your Bible Daily*; *Witness – Tell Others What Christ Has Done for You* (Baptismal Promise 3); and *Be Faithful to God's House* – that is, join with other Christians in regular worship. But the fifth point somehow spoke to me in new ways: ***Pay your Tithes and Offerings!*** Well, I'd certainly heard stewardship sermons growing up in the church. But I'm not sure I had ever before heard the verse from Malachi 3:8 that Brother Friend quoted, using the KJV of course:

***Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings*** (KJV).

To this day I don't know why that verse of scripture stuck with me. I had no income as a college senior. Immediately after graduation, I traveled to New Guinea where I taught at a Lutheran mission high school for two years – I received no salary while there. Returning to the States, I went to graduate school for a year, living at home – no income there either; just expenses. It wasn't until 1971 when I accepted a teaching position in Florida that I actually started earning an income. And then, like many young people fresh out a graduate school, I had all sorts of expenses: monthly rent and utility payments on an apartment; payments on my first car; a government student loan to repay; and loans from my folks to repay.

I remember sitting down at the end of September after picking up my first pay check and writing out checks for the bills that had come in. When I'd finished, I only had about \$40.00 left in the checking account; and that had to cover food and other necessities for a full month (paychecks were only distributed once/month). Yet somehow, even during that first year of teaching, Brother Friend's sermon kept coming to mind about the spiritual discipline of financial giving (perhaps because his sermon notes were just inside the cover of my bible).

I wanted to give financially, but didn't know how I could. Things were excruciatingly

tight financially, but I did decide I would wait until the end of the next month and see if there was anything left in the checkbook. Not surprisingly, there was never any money left! After several months of this, I finally realized that if I was going to take financial stewardship seriously, I was going to have to consider financial giving as important as paying the rent, the car payment, and my various loans and other bills. So I came up with a plan in which I would write a check for giving, right up front along with all those bills I had to pay. I don't remember what percentage I used - whether it was an actual 10% tithe or not, but at least it was something. But not being too trusting, I held onto that check until I got the next paycheck, just to make sure I wouldn't overdraw the checking account. Then I would give it away. Strangely, I found I still had the same amount of money left over at the end of each month in the checking account as I had had before I started a definite plan of giving. Quite honestly, I have never quite figured out how that could be.

But I do believe God indeed honored and blessed my meager attempts to take financial stewardship seriously. One year later, a fellow teacher told me of a rental opening in his apartment complex: a two bedroom duplex (as opposed to the one bedroom I was then renting) and with a rent \$60.00/month less than I was currently paying. The two bedrooms also meant I was able to have a room-mate to help share the costs.

That was the beginning of my spiritual journey regarding financial giving. Over the years tithing has become as basic to me and my husband as is paying our mortgage. And, over the years, I have realized and experienced the spiritual benefits of regular and intentional financial giving: 1) It has been a way of showing thanksgiving to our generous God for the blessings I have received; 2) it has helped me grow spiritually as I developed more self-discipline, responsibility, and maturity in the management of my God-given possessions; 3) it has provided a way of loving and reaching out to others by supporting programs that help to meet others spiritual and physical needs; and 4) it has enabled me to express commitment to Christ and to Christ's body, the church.

### **All Saints' Celebration Today**

Today we remember the saints, like Brother Friend, who have gone before us and we remember that we too are called to be saints. Saints are examples of what God's grace and God's Holy Spirit can do in the lives of baptized people like ourselves. The stories of the saints of old remind us that we present-day saints do not live our lives in a vacuum. We are all part of a larger story, a larger community. Sometimes that larger community may challenge us or trouble us; sometimes we may embrace it with joy. Regardless, in celebrating All Saints today, we liturgically recognize that we are connected to something much bigger than ourselves alone. We are connected to a great cloud of witnesses who give testimony to the activity of God past, present, and future. This God called our ancestors into faithful living, calls each of us gathered here into faithful living, and will also call our children into faithful living.

So a question: How will you and I seek to engage in faithful living as a saint of God and as a steward of God's gifts in the here and now?

### **Conclusion – a story**

George W. Carrol was a wealthy philanthropist who gave large sums to Baptist causes. After he had lost much in the depression years of the 1920s, he was viewing a building he helped construct. Someone said, "Aren't you sorry now you gave all that money away?" He answered, "No, because all I kept for myself is lost, and only that which I gave away has been preserved."

When the temporal things of life have passed away, that which we have invested in Christ's cause will continue to flourish and bear fruit. This is our calling as saints of God.

### **THE RED ENVELOPES**