

There is still a vision!

Text: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

Rev. Nanette Pitt

November 3, 2013

Please pray with me!

Holy One, give us hearts to know your Word – open our ears as we listen, our mouths as we speak, and our eyes as we see. In your name we pray. Amen.

Friday was All Saints Day in the Christian calendar. A variety of cultures and religious traditions have observances around this time: Halloween, All Saints, Day of the Dead, Samhain, All Souls. A way for people to honor the legacy of those who came before and to treasure the memory of loved ones.

Perhaps you took a moment to look at the two tables at the front of the sanctuary as you brought your pledge forward this morning, or maybe you brought a picture along with you to worship and added it to a table. If so, you may already have had a chance to take a look at the faces up here ó a myriad of cultures and traditions are represented. If you haven't already come up (or even if you have), Communion today will offer us all another opportunity to come up. After you receive Communion, please take your time as you walk past the tables and look at the faces and think too of those people who are in your heart on an occasion like this.

Now don't be mistaken ó you'll notice that some of the pictures on the tables here are recent. And, I hope that not all the people that you remember when you think of your own saints, teachers, or mentors, are dead! Fact one: not only the dead are saints. And fact two: saints aren't people who've necessarily done something extraordinary. We all are saints, the Apostle Paul explains in his letter to the Ephesians. People who are faithfully following Christ are saints. Professor Mark Tranvik explains that Paul òí routinely calls the members of his churches "saints" because of who they are in Christ and not because of what they have accomplished.ö

I didn't grow up in a religious tradition that observed All Saints day. In fact, I think some of my forebears who were staunch Protestants in the austere vein of Calvin would be rolling in their graves if they knew I decorated these tables and encouraged this topic.

All that said, while I may not have called them saints, there are people who had a major impact on my life and whose voices I hear, whether they are with me or not. My grandmother is a presence like this ó she was a math and Latin teacher, and I was her youngest grandchild so, while she taught me a great deal, she also indulged and encouraged me a lot, too. Her warmth and pride in me were a rich blessing, and even though I acted like it didn't matter, I treasured the fact that she always told me she prayed for me.

Then there was the High School English teacher who had the whole class learn

to recite e.e. cummings from heart and encouraged the poet in many of us. Do you have people like this in your life? People whose pictures you'd put up on the remembrance table today for the role they played in your life? The example they were to you?

This past week, there was news footage after the flooding in Colorado, and we saw a woman who had gained access to her home for the first time. She was carefully and as quickly as possible rescuing all of her photographs, gingerly laying them out on a table so they could dry. Steven, my spouse, commented on how he remembered footage after the floods in the Midwest, and that they'd shown another person who had to flee ahead of the flood, not taking any possessions along. After the flood, the first thing the person did was to come back into the house, find all their photographs and begin hanging them up on the washing line to dry. Not jewelry, not electronics, not china, or silverware ó photographs. Photographs are strong representations of our love and loyalty ó our heritage and legacy. I wonder if you were to add a picture to the table today ó whose face would you want to honor?

I wonder who ó in this place ó have been saints to you? There are some wonderful images here of moments and times when someone has allowed the light of Christ to shine for the church and the world to see, whether it's while working with children, building a home, delivering flowers or a meal, tending the sick, or caring for those who are otherwise forgotten.

The church is a lot like a family (in fact you could say we're a family of saints). As the Body of Christ, we represent Christ, not only to the world, but to one another. No one of us owns a greater measure of the truth, grace, or love of God, but we each share in it and as a whole we make it real and manifest in the world. And here's the remarkable thing ó we share in God's truth, grace, and love and together make it real today, but it is even larger than all of us today.

Start stretching the idea through space and time í through time í and geographically. Realizing our place in the line of saints has a daunting aspect to it, who will carry this legacy forward? Will it ever be as good as it was in (pick your date) when we could do x, y, z. We lament the missing generations in the church ó perhaps even your own grown children who choose not to attend services. We lament the lack of volunteers, the costs involved in maintaining our meeting house, the general lack of appreciation in society at large for the role or sanctity of the church and the church-hour.

Here we find this morning's prophet, Habakkuk. Much of the law that the prophet identifies as becoming slack or numb is people's indifference to right living ó living in accordance with the laws of the temple. In the face of this indifference and the resulting lawlessness, destruction, and strife, what does Habakkuk do? He declares: I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my

complaint. (Hab 2:1) Scripture bears out that Habakkuk's persistent lament and vigilant watching and patient waiting have results.

Then the Lord answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay. (Hab 2:3-4).

Following Habakkuk and the prophet's example, we should lament or we should call out to God. But we also need to be faithful as saints, resolute in our determination to stay the course and stand watch. Commentator Donna Schaper points out that "the gospel gives us both the permission and the commandment to enter difficulty with hope."

Feasting on the Word: We are a people of hope because, let's get real or the golden age we sometimes wish the church was still in today wasn't so golden when you look at it up close. Injustice, wrongdoing, violence, indifference, those aren't anything new. Does that mean that wickedness is winning? No, it does not. As a people of hope, we believe that "there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay."

Does that mean that in order to honor the memory of all who built this church and this faith, we must try to make it like we imagine it was before? Like we imagine it was during their "golden age"? No it does not. Like the saints who came before us, Scripture is asking us to be like Habakkuk or faithful witnesses standing guard on the rampart crying out to God and waiting patiently. Not moaning that things aren't as they once were, but looking still forward in hope knowing that "there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay."

Faithfulness asks us to honor all the saints who made us who we are today: those teachers, mentors, family members, and loved ones who shaped and molded us; those saints of the church who cared for this church, this budget, these buildings, ministers and ministries so they could be ours for the world today; those saints who did the same throughout time and space, so that many people could know the Good News of Jesus Christ and God's love for all.

However, we do not honor the memory of those who came before if we try to keep it all the same as we imagine it was in some golden age, if we don't live into the fullness of who we can become in our own time and space! Let's be practical about what I mean here: This building wasn't always here or in fact it is the fourth our congregation has known. We didn't always worship in pews facing front. We haven't always had full rights to the pew we sit in. We haven't always sung the same hymns. The hymns we sing and treasure haven't always had the same words. We haven't always done missions the same way or had the same boards and committees or Church School.

In other words, our task as faithful people is to be the same as the saints who came before us only in so much as we learn from Habakkuk and all who have struggled since

We step into our right as people of hope. We don't look back at the way it was before, but rather, we, too, jump atop the rampart and look forward towards God and towards what God is making real through us in this time and place.

As a people of hope, the Good News for us today that we need to hear and testify is that "there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay."

Amen.

© 2013 Rev. Nanette Pitt

First Church of Christ Congregational
United Church of Christ
12 South Main Street, West Hartford, Connecticut 06107
860.233.9605 www.whfirstchurch.org