

I'm excited today. I'm excited to be celebrating each of us as part of the church as well as remembering those who have gone before us and confident of those who will come after us. I am also getting goosebumps as I think about the public affirmation of faith that we will witness and take part in as we baptize an adult, Kathy Nash [at our 10:30 service/ in just a few moments.] It is a great day to be part of the church.

One of the reasons I am so excited about today is that I know a little bit about Kathy's life story and about her faith journey. Like each person here, Kathy has known struggle and suffering. There were times in her life when she was, as they say, "kicked in the teeth." Despite these trying times and difficulties, Kathy has chosen hope. She chooses faith. In doing so, Kathy is not unlike the disciples who heard Jesus' Sermon on the Plain that we heard read in today's Gospel. Jesus offers the disciples reassurance. He is giving them tremendous encouragement to live out their faith in the midst of terrible circumstances.¹

Like Jesus, the disciples know poverty, they know hunger and they have reason to weep. The physical circumstances of their lives offered

¹ Robert Leach, "Theological Perspective," *Feasting on the Word Year C volume 4*, (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville KY) 2010. 236.

them little to no opportunity to live otherwise.² How then could they endure?

They chose hope. They chose faith. Hope in God that there is eternal meaning in their endurance for the sake of God's Kingdom. Faith in God who has always been faithful to us.

As they emulated Jesus, as WE emulate Jesus, we actually become more like Jesus in being faithfully obedient to God. And we don't do it by ourselves. We do it because God helps us do it. We do it, because we help each other do it. Kathy will make vows today, vows that are hard if not impossible to keep if she had to do it alone. But we will help her - and each other - keep those vows. God will help her keep those vows. And more and more, little by little, as Kathy seeks to love God, serve her neighbor and respect the dignity of every human being, she takes part in ushering in the Kingdom of God and shares the hope and faith she has been given through Christ.

In today's bulletin, in the reflections on All Saints Day, you will see a quote by the poet Robert Louis Stephenson "A saint is a sinner who keeps on going." And it's true, isn't it? "A saint is a sinner who keeps on going." Like Luke, the author of our Epistle is also offering hope to the early

² Ibid.

Christian community. The beginning verses speak to the human-divine relationship that fulfills the purposes of God. Notice that there are always two parties to a relationship. There's God, the author of everything, who is greater than and above the powers of this world. Then there's us. Between God and us is a promise, the promise of God's Kingdom, the promise that all will be as God intends. To accept the promise, to see that promise realized however, comes our choice. Do we chose hope or do we chose despair? When we chose hope, we live into becoming a saint, because we are sinners who keep on going.

As sinners who keep on going, we choose to place our hope in our risen Lord, we chose to hear God's word of truth and we choose to believe. When we do this, our heart felt response is to praise God's glory.³ We begin with all the sinners who keep on going right here in our midst. And we end on this All Saints and All Souls Sunday with a cosmic sense of all the saints, sinners who kept on going in their own time. We stand on their shoulders, those who have gone before us. And we model for those yet to come how to be saints as sinners who kept on going.

³ Mary H. Schertz, "Theological Perspective," *Feasting on the Word Year C Volume 4* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville KY) 2010. 232.

And we keep trying - practicing - to get it right. We try to put our whole trust and hope in God. We try to act and believe that God is in charge. Until that moment when we think we know better, that we're in control, that we're in charge of a particular outcome. In that moment the trust in God that is required is absolutely terrifying to us. God's triumph over death through Jesus Christ shows us that to be like Christ we relinquish all we hold dear; that we are aware that Christ's victory came through the cross.⁴ We have to remind ourselves that God has always been faithful to us. We have to remind ourselves that God is always doing the surprising and unexpected thing. We have to remind ourselves that we are the recipients of unimaginable love. And we let go and hope. We have faith. We are journeying into being saints because we are sinners who keep on going.

AMEN.

⁴ Ibid, 234.