

Sermon, St. David's Episcopal Church, Feast of All Saints, 11/5/2017 (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

I did not get to be with you all last year on our Sunday celebration of the Feast of All Saints. Now, All Saints' Day is actually November 1<sup>st</sup>, but because it is such an important feast, Episcopalians transfer it to the Sunday following November 1 when we don't have a service on the actual date. This usually translates to the end of Daylight Saving Time, so we are all usually in a better mood, having had an extra hour of sleep; so that also make it an optimal time to collect pledge cards, we discovered a few years ago.

I'm kidding about that last part. We did move our pledge ingathering two years ago to coincide with the Feast of All Saints, not because we thought a little extra sleep would lead to generosity, but because that year our theme was "Make a Joyful Noise." That was the first year we had a fully functioning bell tower, which inspired our theme. It seemed fitting to end on All Saints Sunday, when we would read what's called the "necrology" while tolling our new bell. Which of course, was not new at all; we inherited it from another church in the 1980s, and it lived in people's garages until we finally built the tower, which you may remember was a whole story in itself. The person who began building it left the church, so it was half-finished out there for months and months and months. Steve Mattis was the hero who finished it up.

Our beloved Ron Dale schooled us on the proper ringing of the bell, vs. tolling. There's a rope out there used to ring the bell a few minutes before the service starts, but there is something else to strike it to toll the bell. Tolling the bell is what we do on days like today, when we read the "necrology," that is, the list of names of people who have died since last All Saints Day.

That first year we did it, I was overcome by the power of that bell. Our campaign was "Make a Joyful Noise," but the bell added a solemnity to reading those names that struck me to my core. I had to have Deacon Bill read the names at the two later services because I cried through the first list. My father was on it that year.

When my mom died last year on Halloween, I was grateful that she was one day shy of All Saints. Seriously, one of the first things I thought of was, thank you God that I won't have to try to read her name at All Saints' next year with that bell tolling.

It's important to note that All Saints' Day is not only honoring saints who have died. It may seem that way, because we brought pictures of some of those saints and have placed them in the windows, and we might light candles to them, and hear their names read. All of those things are part of All Souls' Day on November 2, or the Feast of the Faithful Departed, which is part of what we honor today. But we also honor all the holy people of God, from Saint Francis to our own Saint Deacon Bill, who hopes to be back with us at the 9 o'clock service next Sunday. We honor the everyday saints that we encounter here at St. David's and at other places where Christians are found.

The saints who especially thrill me lately as the ones who work on our labyrinth. Today, as part of communion, we have special labyrinth cookies baked by Saint Cathy Alonso in lieu of our usual communion bread. The labyrinth has been a wonderful symbol of our stewardship campaign this year, just as the bell was two years ago.

Our church is undergoing a transition. It's a painful one, closing our preschool. The labyrinth helps us to look ahead, and all last week, saints came together to create a beautiful space for prayer. For pilgrimage. For meditation. For connection to God.

When we first started talking about the labyrinth, I thought about what it would be like when it was finished. Before the groundbreaking, I prayed out there and pondered what it would be like. Will I walk the labyrinth every morning before I go into the office, or maybe in the evening? Will I forget it's there for months at a time? Will people I don't know come use it, and maybe years from now tell me, oh, you are at St. David's? I love that labyrinth.

But now that work has been going on since the end of September, I am enthralled by the creation process itself. We said we had no idea how long it would take, but the digging part definitely took longer than I thought it was going to. But I have loved playing even a tiny part in that. Like so many of you, I am not able to go dig in the dirt most weekday mornings, but I have shown up on three of the Saturdays, and I feel like I have been part of something so special. I will always feel like a steward of that labyrinth.

That's how I hope you saints feel not only about the labyrinth but about St. David's. This is God's church, and this is our church family. We are part of something larger than ourselves. Together we are building this place.

This church is also part of something larger than itself. I thought of you all last All Saints when I was at my mother's church, the morning following her funeral. Just as we do here, the flowers used at her funeral were the altar flowers on the following Sunday, All Saints. And just as the flower guild does here, they asked us what colors she loved best. She loved blue and white, and those flowers were so beautiful. I heard her name read, and looked at those blue flowers, and of course I thought of her, but I also thought of you all here, observing All Saints here. I thought of Matthew White, who despite a difficult meeting he had that week, offering to jump in and preach for me, and how he and Brittney said it was no problem to wait to baptize Khalil, even though we had already moved the date one time. I thought of Fletcher Lowe, who celebrated the Eucharist without any charge that day. I thought of Tammy Shackelford, who called and offered to help with my dog Pepper.

All the Saints.

At the 9:00, on Ingathering Sunday, we do something that I didn't think I was going to like when I first heard about it in 2011 as your new rector. After the offering plates are brought up, you are invited, at the 9:00, to bring up your pledge cards. When I heard about that, I thought, what a

weird custom that I will need to abolish after I've done my duty as the new rector and tried it once.

But that first time, I was overcome by all of the saints coming up here and placing your pledge card on the altar. Even though those first few years we didn't do this as part of the Feast of All Saints, it truly was a way to all claim together, *this* is our little piece of God's kingdom, and it matters to us. I was covered in goosebumps during that ritual, and I look forward to it today.

Today we celebrate the saints in our lives who are now with God, and we celebrate the saints in this room with us and those who can't be here with us and those who are in other churches. Today we honor all the saints. Thank you all for being saints. How will we live into our sainthood today?