

## Inspiring Lives

Hebrews 11:1-2, 4-5, 8-12, 23-25, 27-38, and 12:1

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

November 6, 2022

Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

Who are you remembering today? Who are the people who inspire you? Who are the people who have made a difference in your life?

Is it Sally Smith, a saint of this church whose commitment to peace and justice was evident in the ways she led both congregational and campus ministry?

Is it a public figure like Mother Teresa who lived a life of commitment and compassion for the poor, or Martin Luther King, Jr. who risked and lost his life as he fought for equality and justice and the vision of beloved community?

Is it one of our church members who we remembered today?

Perhaps Ruth Potter who in her 103 years of life lived in ways to preserve relationships, encourage others, and choose hope? Or Marian Plecker who found a way to balance work and play, who knew how to not only survive but to thrive even in hard times?

Is it Margaret Rossman who was strong and intelligent, faithful and generous, who inspired us with her sheer determination? Or Linda Flinn who sought out relationships with so many of us and was courageous enough to be honest about her own struggles?

Is it your parent or grandparent, spouse or sibling, a teacher or a friend? Is it someone who remains among us, perhaps someone worshipping with us today?

Today we are reminded of the impact that people have on other people...the impact that others have had on us...even the impact that we can have on others. And we are reminded that we are better with good community to surround us, with people who can bolster us up when needed, with those who encourage us - in flesh or in memory - when we are struggling.

Earlier in the service we heard a reading from the book of Hebrews. This is often referred to as the "roll call of heroes and heroines of faith." Of course, that language, along with the language of All Saints Sunday, might be a bit confusing because we sometimes think words like "heroes" or "saints" are reserved for perfect people.

But both our scripture and our service today remind us that being a person who matters, who makes a difference isn't about perfection but rather about perseverance. In fact, it is often those who manage to make a difference in the midst of their imperfections who we admire most.

That is certainly true of this list that we heard in Hebrews as well as with other characters in scripture. After all, if we read the stories honestly, we know that even the great prophets and kings, the heroes and heroines of our faith...they were undeniably human...they were ordinary people who sometimes did extraordinary things.

And yet even then we don't just remember them for the extraordinary. Yes, David was a great king, but it might be his remorse and grief to which we most deeply relate. Yes, Elijah was an amazing prophet, but it might be his honest questioning that most draws us to him. Yes, Martha was a faithful friend and follower of Jesus, but we might appreciate her the most when she challenges Jesus' absence during their family crisis.

We don't observe All Saints Sunday in order to put people on a pedestal, but rather in order to be reminded that we need each other, that people matter to us, that we are - as we often say - created to live in community.

We need the others with whom we worship and work, with whom we experience life and love.

We need the others whose stories continue to be told beyond their deaths.

We need the others who model for us the types of lives we can live and the contributions we can choose to make.

And so we worship and we remember. We remember those who have gone before us with all their gifts and contributions, as well as their faults and foibles. We remember them and we look to them to help us be better people.

After all, this passage we read in Hebrews...it comes after the writer has acknowledged that the people are struggling, they are finding it hard to persevere, to keep the confidence of their faith in the midst of difficulty. So, the writer reminds them of all those who have fought the good fight before them.

And our reading culminated in these words, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1, NRSV).

So, today we celebrate the great cloud of witnesses. We celebrate that people across time and space have modeled what living lives of love and compassion, of honesty and integrity, of perseverance and hope, looks like. We celebrate that when we are struggling to keep up the work of being faithful, we have witnesses upon whom to lean. We celebrate that when we are tired and when doubts arise, the faithful who have gone before us or who surround us right here, can pick up our work and can hope on our behalf until we find our way back.

And not only do we celebrate them, but we are reminded that we are invited to live in such ways that our lives inspire others. We are invited to not only receive the encouragement of people of the past or people around us, but to be those who encourage both strangers and friends of this generation and those yet to come. We are invited, not to put on a big show of faith, but in humility and compassion to live with a commitment to love in Jesus' ways. May it be so.