

All Saints'

November 1, 2015

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Isaiah 25:6-9 God will swallow up death forever

Revelation 21:1-6a Death will be no more

John 11:32-44 Lazarus, come out!

At last Wednesday's 10 am service we reflected on the ministry and works in the late 1800s of James Hannington. After earning BA and MA degrees from Oxford, he was ordained, served as a curate in his home town, and then offered to serve the Church Missionary Society in Africa. He was consecrated Bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa, and set out for Uganda. While approaching Uganda, his party was met by a group sent from King Mwanga. They thought Hannington was there to colonize Uganda, as England had previously colonized much of Africa. Hannington was killed before reaching his assigned territory; before preaching a word about Christ. But the people of Uganda were moved by his passion and sacrifice for Christ; many became Christians through future missionary work; and today Uganda is a stronghold of Christianity in Africa.

That is the sort of story we relate to when we think of saints of the church. But there are many other people who impact the course of faith in Christ on this earth. Let me give you some examples from my perspective:

As a teenager I loved Boy Scouts, and decided to commit to earning enough merit badges to make the rank of Eagle Scout. One merit badge I chose was Radio merit badge. I went to the local junk yard and paid about \$1 for the starter coil out of an old car. I used the wire for an antenna, and wound more of it around a paper towel roll to make a coil. I mail-ordered a crystal, cat whisker, and capacitor. I mounted them on a block of wood, hooked up the wire that I had strung between the two trees in our front yard, and... I heard the radio station in Watertown, 13 miles away. Yayy !! I was hooked.

My uncle, Dick Crosby came to visit us, and I showed him my AMAZING crystal radio. He came back a few weeks later with this book as a gift to me. It is a radio amateur handbook. He said that I might want to read some of it, to learn WHY that radio worked, and how I could build a radio that would let me hear and talk around the world. For a kid in a farm town of 1800 people, my uncle was offering me a vision of a life beyond anything I had ever thought possible. Who has helped you reach beyond what you thought was possible in your life?

Then Bob Smith, the owner of the auto parts store in town, offered to drive me to Watertown every week for a few months, while he and I studied and took the test to become licensed amateur radio operators. I got the call WN2ISY.

Then Frank Gordon, my high school science teacher, offered to contact some friends of his at Syracuse University, to see if he could help me get accepted into engineering school. I was accepted.

Then on another track in my life, there was Fr Ayers, at Emmanuel Episcopal Church, who asked me at about age 10 to become an acolyte. I loved it.

Fr. Ron Molrine at St Stephen's in Erie, Pa found out that I never got confirmed. I was in my late 20s, and about to move from Erie. He talked the Bishop into a private confirmation service, and committed me to study the catechism later.

Fr. Walter Giles asked me to join a new class for the beginning of a brand new theology training course called Education for Ministry: EFM. It is much of the theological training for seminary, structured for the laity. I was hooked.

The technical track and the theological track converged here in San Jose. Fr. Bob Landreth from St. Francis talked with me about ordination, and presented me to Bishop Shimpfky.

This group of people I just introduced you to have been my great cloud of witnesses. They have kept me moving forward throughout my whole life. And YOU are a part of that great cloud of witnesses for me. You have helped me whip up a smoother mixture of skills, technical and theological education, love for God, a heart for pastoral care giving, and a drive to learn how to not just talk about our faith with each other, but live our faith, even when it is hard work.

The prophet Isaiah wrote of a future time when death would be swallowed up forever. John experienced a revelation of God's ultimate plan to create a new heaven and a new earth, where all things are made new. At that time God will live among us. Jesus showed that God holds the power to accomplish this new creation, when he raised Lazarus from the dead, and later when God raised Jesus from the dead. In the meantime the saints and the souls of the church are given the charge to build the city of God right here on earth.

I do not think Bob Smith had a clue that his giving me a ride to classes for a ham radio license would somehow fit into God's plan for me to serve this community for the last 13 ½ years as your priest. But he, and the others I told you about, and others I don't even remember their names, and others who had an impact on me but I will never know how they influenced my life, all of these are the community of the saints in my life, who have built up my love for God.

The Bible tells us that believers are "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses." (Hebrews) You and I are part of, and surrounded by, that great cloud of witnesses for Jesus Christ. We are made members of that body through our baptism. This is why All Saints' Day is one of the four primary days of the church year for baptisms. We are linked through baptism with every other believer from past times, those who are with us now, and all believers of the future. We have been brought to this place in our faith journey by them, we share that faith with each other now, and we pass it forward by whatever way we demonstrate our faith to the world. We are members of this community of 'saints and souls' who interconnect through the barrier of time, to make one huge Family of God. In a few minutes we will renew our own baptismal vows, in keeping with this message of All Saints' Day.

Praise God for the people who have been models of faith for you. Praise God for the work they have accomplished, and the work they continue to accomplish through you. May you especially think of them, thank them, and pray for them today.

Amen