

Time of Grace Ministry
People Get Ready: Mimic Your Mentors
Hebrews 13:7-8
November 2, 2014

A British prime minister said once, “My education began a hundred years before I was born.” Do you believe that?

You’ve heard of the phrase “self-made man,” haven’t you? Some people who have made it in business kind of like that feeling like, “I’ve done this all myself.” But you know it’s really not true. We most certainly don’t make ourselves in business; we need a big team around us. That’s certainly true of our faith development, as well. What I’d like to talk with you and reflect with you about today is how we are heirs of a tremendous number of people behind us who’ve handed on the Christian faith to us.

The Christian faith is transmitted most effectively within families. I know without a doubt that I am a Christian today because of Christians who are now dead who passed it on. And I know where I got my faith from – it was a from a dear lady, my mother. And I know why I would have listened to her because when I was little, I listened to her about everything. She was the first voice I knew. I could hear her voice when I was in her womb. I couldn’t make out the words and if I could have made them out, I wouldn’t have understood them, but I knew her voice. I could feel her voice when she would talk. Her body would vibrate and I would feel it. I’m sure that the reason I’m here with you today is because of this continuity and I want to celebrate that with you today!

November 1st in the Christian calendar for many years has been set aside as the Feast of All Saints. It has different meanings to different people. There is also an All Souls Day. If you come from a Latino country, they have the Dia de la Muertos, the Day of the Dead. These are related concepts but the basic concept is to look back and give thanks for those who have passed and especially who have passed on the Christian faith to this generation.

The most basic usage in the Scripture of the word saint is you; the believers! It’s a synonym for the believers. Now you might think that this sounds a little crazy because every pastor I know spends a little bit of time in every Sunday message trying to tell you what sinners you are. Like, we beat on you first to make you ashamed. Isn’t that pretty much first half? You kind of are expecting that, right? Doesn’t it sound shocking that somebody who you’ve been persuaded to admit and confess your sins, what a sinner you are, to find out that you are sanctus; you are a saint? But you are! For though a sinner indeed, through your faith you are washed in the blood of Jesus, which makes you as clean as he is.

This is extraordinary news. Jesus’ work declares you to be as holy and pure as he is. So in God’s court, in God’s legal system, in the documents that will be presented on your day in court, it will show you to be completely innocent of any sin. That you are righteous before God and the gates of heaven will stand open before you forever because opened by the golden key of the one who made the payments on your behalf so you can claim that term “saint.” When the Scripture says, “Blessed is the death of the saints,” that you can claim that! That’s me God’s talking

about. God likes it when people die because now they're home; they're safe. We hate it when we lose loved ones. God says, "Blessed are those who die in the Lord. Blessed in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints," because that means their journey is over and their new life has begun. We focus on what has ended and what's taken away from us. God is celebrating what has begun and what now will last forever.

We also use the term as a term of respect for some of the great leaders of the New Testament. Although the term has leaked into the Old Testament just a little, the Welsh and some of the Celtic peoples call David a saint, for instance, Saint David. But mostly the term is reserved for the great leaders of the New Testament. The biographers of Jesus, commissioned to do his authorized biography, you see the pictures above my head – Saint Matthew, Saint Mark, Saint Luke and Saint John. We also use that term as a gesture of respect to the great teachers and writers and apostles of the New Testament. Paul and Peter, for instance, and James, we give them that honor and dignity. And it also is used in a further way of significant leaders in the past who have worked very, very hard and sometimes have been given that term as a gesture of respect. So churches have been named for some of the great missionaries, for instance, or some of the great reformers. There are a few Saint Martin churches in the world – some named for St. Martin of Tour, a great leader in France and some after Saint Martin Luther, who was one of the great reformers of the church. And we also use it of people who are believers who have died. So if I say to you, "You know, I first heard that from my sainted grandmother," you know what I'm trying to say, right? That means granny is dead. My sainted grandmother, my sainted father, means that they have died and received their white robes, so to speak.

I'd like to celebrate that with you today. We take stuff so for granted. We seem to think, "I built everything in my life." That is such bologna! We are beneficiaries and heirs of so much of what the people of the past have left behind for us and most precious of all is our Christian faith. Not a one of you – or, I bet hardly any of you – figured this out by yourself by just reading a Bible completely on your own and coming to faith with just you and God. I know that it's theoretically possible and if that's you, please tell me after church so I correct this in future messages when I stray onto this topic again. But the vast majority of you – and I would kind of bet a dollar all of you – have come to the faith with the assistance of other Christians and today is the day in which we celebrate that incredible impact and value and I want you to start thinking about the three people who have had that greatest impact on you.

While you're thinking about that, open your Bible to Hebrews 11. You heard a nugget of it from the Scripture reading for today, but more than any other book in the Bible, the book of Hebrews celebrates the way in which Christianity is not some novel new thing that came upon the earth at the time of Jesus. It is the grand fulfillment of everything that God has been up to ever since Adam and Eve first began to go around and enjoy the Garden of Eden. We're just a series of interlocking gears. If you've ever come to visit me at my house you know that I have a lot of clocks. If you've ever looked inside a mechanical clock, you will see a brass forest of gears all interlocking. And the little one over here, the worm gear over here, this one with a big wheel, this one with just a little nub with only a few little brass teeth on it, they're all moving together and when this one moves over here it causes this one to move. And everything is driven by the spring; it makes all the other gears move. They're all connected.

You and I are Christians today; we're just gears in God's wonderful gigantic clock. And we're all recruited and added to this mighty machine. But our gears – we don't drive our own; we're driven. And we're hooked up and connected to the motivation of other people and some of them are listed here for you.

The book of Hebrews 11 is called the catalog of the heroes of faith and I hope that someday soon you will read this and savor it and celebrate it, especially at a time of All Saints in this first week of November. There are eleven people who are named with a description of the powerful impact of their work: Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. Isaac, Joseph, Moses' parents – Amram and Jochebed – Moses himself, although I hasten to add he may have a different name in heaven because that's his Egyptian name. His mother, his Jewish mother, had a different name for him and it wasn't Moses and maybe we'll find out. Maybe he'll prefer, as a gift to his mother, Jochebed, maybe he'll take his original name back and that's who we'll see in heaven. And then Rahab is mentioned also by name, the ex-prostitute. Rahab, what an incredible woman she was!

Others are mentioned; there's a half dozen others mentioned by name without telling what they did. Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, some of the judges, David the king, and Samuel and other prophets. And then the entire people of Israel are mentioned in some of their better moments. They had horrible times of revolting against God and rebelling against him, but sometimes they got it right and they're celebrated here.

The chapter concludes with some thrilling words reminding you that all these people had something missing. None of them could enjoy the fullness of seeing their true identity. Though like you they are princes and princesses of the royalty of heaven, their lives were hard or cut short, like Abel's. Slaughtered down, cut down in cold blood; the first murder victim. Enoch, an isolated believer. Noah, one of apparently very few believers on the face of the earth. I will admit to the great possibility that other believers were around at Noah's time; they drowned in the flood and got to go to Judgment Day and to heaven early. But there were so few that God wiped them off the face of the earth. Abraham was so isolated, he and Sarah lived surrounded by people who had only contempt for his beliefs and where everybody else – all the cool people, the intelligent, the educated people, the rich people – all believed in Baal; that the true cause of fertility and the giver of rain was Baal and Asherah, his sister wife. And they had to hold onto their faith all alone with no support system. What heroes! It's no wonder they got weak a little bit but he's a hero to us. And all the rest had terrible stresses that they labored under but did not give in. The bottom of the chapter celebrates: "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." "Made perfect" in the sense not that they were declared to be holy; that's Jesus' work. But "made perfect" in the sense of made complete. They're still not fulfilled; their gig isn't complete yet. They haven't been completed and that won't happen until we are with them.

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, let's run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus" and that is the impulse that the stories of those heroic believers give to us. That's the impulse that as we take a backward look at the believers who've gone before – though great sinners, though sometimes acting like fools, they made bad

personal decisions, perhaps some of them made bad financial decisions, perhaps some of them had a checkered job history, some of them maybe were very ill or could not do everything they might have wished. Some of them were good parents; some of them were perhaps lousy parents or absent parents – but in spite of their frailties and weaknesses, they successfully kept the faith moving forward; those ripples that keep flowing outward from that Pentecost miracle when Christ was proclaimed to the world.

Now one last – I feel like I just skipped a stone and if you ever get a seven-skipper where it kind of spans along the water – it kind of goes bank, bank, bank, bank, bank and then it goes down. I just kind of skipped with you and here's where I want to land. If you turn one more page to chapter thirteen, here's my "so what" from all of that cloud of witnesses; chapter 13:7 "And so remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life," the joyful and confident way in which they died. The fearless way in which they could let go of everything here, knowing that they would inherit everything on the other side of the grave and imitate their faith. Live the way they lived, those heroes, joyfully and confidently, willing even to surrender your life rather than surrender your relationship with the Lord Jesus, making your relationship with Jesus the most precious possession you have.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Not according to his humanity, for he was different in the past. In Old Testament times he was in spirit only; he didn't have his body. But he is God the same; changeless and eternal as he told the Pharisees one time before Abraham was, "I Am." He claimed for himself the majestic title of God's name, "I Am." Ehyeh or Yahweh; it's where our word "Jehovah," comes from. "I Am, I Am." Changeless indefinitely into the past. He was there before all creation and will exist to all eternity. And there's another wonderful way in which Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever and that is he alone opens the gates of heaven, even in Old Testament times. In fact, going clear back to father Adam and mother Eve, he alone is the one who can open paradise to the those two foolish sinners. As he told Eve, even when she was hanging her head in shame and humility over the stupid things that she and her foolish husband had done, even when he's about to tell her you're going to lose your place in paradise here in the Garden of Eden and your life is going to get very hard and painful and he told Adam, God told Adam, "Now your work is going to fight you and you will have thorns and thistles in your ground and your days will get hard and you're going to die." Before he said those hard things, he said, "Eve, you're going to have a descendant who is going to crush the serpent who tempted you." You will win in the end so even then, the champion, Jesus Christ, was presented as the one with the golden key to open up heaven. He is the same Savior for them and all those other people who are listed in the catalog of the heroes of faith; Abraham and Enoch and Noah and David and Samson and Jephthah and all the rest. Jesus in prophecy that he would come, Jesus in testimony that he has come, is the way that opens up heaven; the only way, the way, the truth, and the life.

I'd like you now – I hope you've been thinking of those three people – I'd like you now to celebrate the three most significant people who have passed away who transmitted their faith. Maybe verbally, maybe the way they lived, maybe their actions had the most forceful impact on you, just as you as a little kid watched how they talked and acted. Maybe their heritage and legacy that they left behind still sustains you today. And I would like you to thank God for those three people – and all the rest – but those three in particular I'd like you to name. And I'd like

you also to realize that God uses people in a grand human network to sustain our faith, to encourage us on our way, to teach us things so we don't have to try to figure out everything all in advance. Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you.

Here in this congregation, we can pause and remember the pastors in our 130-some year history, almost 140 years, now dead who spent their energy and themselves to bring you blessing. Our founding pastor, Joseph Westenberger, and also another one, George Reinsch who came a little later, were traveling missionaries. They served – each of them – at least a half a dozen different churches and planted and started new congregations. They were missionaries at heart.

We've had some tremendous teachers, two of whom – Eugen Notz in the late 1870s and August Pieper in the 1890s – whose teaching gifts were so recognized that they received a call to serve as seminary professors and become teachers of the group. We remember another one who fell early, Pastor Ernst F. Dornfeld, was cut down in the prime of life as he was working out the plans for the building you're sitting in right now and raising the money to break ground and pay for this building and he died of acute appendicitis on the operating table at a time when peritonitis was not as controllable as it is today. His son, Ernst Phillip Dornfeld, finished his father's work and had a long, long and happy career here. And you might want to remember Ernst Phillip Dornfeld for one other reason. Even though he came from the era of Jim Crowe and segregation, he had the courage as he was nearing retirement to do a daring thing and that was to enroll African American kids in an all-white parochial school.

Now you might say, "Well, big deal." In 1954, that was a big deal! Those were the years of segregation, "Now segregation forever," as George Wallace said, and he stuck his neck out and said, "We're going to do this. It's time." He perhaps had been fighting against it like many other white people of his day but in 1955, the year he retired, one of the jewels in his retirement crown that he could wear was the graduation of the first African American student at St. Marcus Lutheran School. And his successor, a man with a missionary's heart, saw to it that this congregation did not take off and move, chasing after the immigrant descendants who originally planted this place. But Paul Knickelbein was a courageous guy who said we're staying here and we are going to serve whoever lives in this neighborhood and help St. Marcus figure out how to be multi-racial and multi-cultural. His successor, now in heaven with Jesus, Pastor Richard Seeger – some of you may remember and know him – was a missionary to Japan and Hong Kong who came here with a missionary's heart and helped us to grow up and develop even further as a multi-racial and multi-cultural congregation. And in his final years before retirement he served as the world missionary in the Caribbean, helping to plant a Christian congregation in the Caribbean and he also served in a home mission in Louisiana.

These are the people who spoke the word of God to us; one more gifted than another. And we are blessed and grateful to the Lord for having sent these leaders into our lives and we profited from them and are blessed by them. This is the day of All Saints, let us thank our God for the heroes and champions in the faith who handed on the faith to us and now have commissioned us to keep it moving and hand it on to the generations to come.

Here's a question from a viewer that I'll bet you've heard in your family or among your close friends. This person writes: *"My daughter stopped going to church and she doesn't take my*

grandchildren, either. I'm concerned about them but she shuts me out when I try to talk to her about it. What can I do?"

Boy, that's a dilemma, isn't it? I wonder how many families there are who have grown children who are Christians and have not worried about one or more or maybe all of their kids. This is a cry from the heart. What do you do?

Well, the first thing is you cannot believe for somebody else. And the second thing is realize that sometimes kids are working their way through dramas of independence that seem to go on long after their teenage years and you think they got over that and they take forever to get over that. Sometimes people use this as a way to send a message to the parents: You can't push me around. You can't make me. And so the important thing is to have a tone when you talk to your children, your adult children, that shows respect. You're no longer way above here and they're down here. Now it's eyes on a level.

Second, never stop talking about it. You have earned the right to be respected and earned the right to say what's on your mind and in your heart; just as you will always listen to what your kids tell you. Third, let the gospel predominate. God unconditionally loves us and your children need to know that you unconditionally love them. And what you're saying is only because you love them, not because you're trying to control them.

And fourth, if there are grandchildren that you have in your family that are not being adequately cared for, then that really means you know for sure what kinds of activities you're going to be doing when they're staying at your house. And without having to get all insulting about it to your daughter or to your son, when the grandkids are with you, that's when you teach them how to pray, that's when you go to church with them, that's when you bring out the God-talk and help them have some kinds of materials that they can read that will make sense to them so that the faith can be transmitted in this way.

And finally, pray like crazy. Your testimony, your words may be remembered even if not fully believed. And ultimately, the power to convert someone from lack of faith to faith has to come from God and his word. It doesn't come from us. So give it to God and let go and trust that God will take care of it from there.

I'd also like to invite you to pray with me today that God would help use the generations to share the gospel.

Heavenly Father, we come to you today and thank you for all of the people who have gone before who've passed on the Christian faith to us. Help us in the very best way possible to pass the faith onto the generations coming after us. Help us to have just the right way to talk about it so that people – our children and grandchildren – will be respected but know they're loved and that they will see not just in our talk but in our lives that you, Father, Lord Jesus, and Holy Spirit, are the most precious part of our lives. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

For Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mark Jeske. Every day is a day of God's amazing grace for you.

Grace notes

guides for personal Bible study

People Get Ready: Mimic Your Mentors

Hebrews 13:7,8: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”

Points to Ponder

1. What is the basic idea behind the celebration of a Feast of All Saints Day? How does that relate to you and how you became a Christian?
2. **Read Hebrews 13:7,8.** Who are some of the people who influenced your faith the most?
3. What does the statement “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” tell you about God’s Word and what he has told us? Does the message that you will share with your children differ from the message that was taught to you?
4. When you consider the way your grandparents or parents have lived their lives, can you see how the Holy Spirit worked through them? In what ways would you like to mimic them in your faith life?
5. **Reread Hebrews 13:7,8.** You have been entrusted by God with the wonderful message of our Savior, so as you age and have children of your own, how will you make sure that they hear the Word of God and cling to it?

Each of us can look back and see the tremendous number of people who have passed down the Christian faith to us. It is spread most effectively within families, and we should have great respect for those who have given us the wonderful news of our Savior. Let us thank God for the heroes and champions in the faith who handed down the faith to us and now have commissioned us to keep it moving and pass it on to the generations to come.

What else does God say?

Hebrews 13:17: Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.

Proverbs 4:20-27: My son, pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one's whole body. Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil.