

Eleventh Weekend After Pentecost (B/RCL): "Florence Nightingale, Simba & Us: 'You're Christ to Me'"

Ephesians 4:1-16

August 4-5, 2018

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

If there is a special nurse in your life, find a way to honor her on Monday, August 13. That's the day on our Lutheran calendar when we remember Florence Nightingale, the Angel of the Crimea and founder of modern-day nursing. It's said that as Florence Nightingale kept her night-time vigil over wounded and dying soldiers, moving from bed to bed in a tent lit only by her famous oil lamp, a patient lovingly gazed up at her and said, "You're Christ to me." In telling that story William Barclay added, "A saint has been defined as 'someone in whom Christ lives again.' That is what the true Church member ought to be."<sup>1</sup>

Today's epistle from the Letter to the Ephesians is a good reminder that we're **all** called to be saints. Actually, we **are** saints, as in "holy ones," set apart in Holy Baptism as God's own children. More than once someone has said to me, "Pastor Mary, I'm no saint!" and I'm not either, if "saint" means perfect or sinless. But for us that's **not** what saint means. In more than one letter Paul addresses an entire community as "saints" – and those communities were no different than ours, imperfect at best, but made up of those who are forgiven sinners, "called," as we hear in today's epistle (Ephesians 4:1):

*"I... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called...."*

I can never hear that verse without thinking of the scene from *The Lion King* in which Mufasa's voice booms from the clouds: "Simba, **you are more than you have become.**" From heaven the lion king is confronting his son, challenging him to clean up his act, get with the program, stop running from his destiny and quit denying his royal identity and sacred responsibility as his father's son. If you've seen *The Lion King* movie or play, you'll remember the

opening scene in which Rafiki, who serves as priest, holds up the baby lion cub for all to see and then anoints him with oil from the gourd.

Here's the connection: in baptism **we** were anointed and made adopted kids of the King-with-a-capital-K. Baptism is not a secular rite of passage. It's a sacrament, a divinely commanded ritual in which God mystically acts through water & Word to join us to the death and resurrection of Christ and to seal us with the cross of Christ forever. We are different **after** we're baptized than we were **before**. It's not a matter of "one and done." Our identity is changed: we become prophet, priest and king: **prophet** to proclaim God's Word, **priest** to intercede for the world, **royalty** because we are now baptized brothers and sisters of Christ the King. We are set apart for God's work in this world. If your day-to-day life seems far removed from that, consider the possibility that "**You are more than you have become,**" and hear the plea in today's epistle:

*"I... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called..."*

When I was little and a student in parochial school, we were always told to "Pray for vocations." That meant asking God to call men and women to become priests and nuns. To have a vocation meant to become a "religious," whom we thought of as celibate, professional Christians. One of the things that first attracted me to Lutheranism is Luther's teaching 500 years ago that every baptized person is part of the **priesthood of the faithful**. There are no "professional" or "amateur" Christians. There are only Christians. We're **all** called to serve our Lord lifelong, however God calls us. We're **all** given gifts to share with the community of faith and with the world. No one can say, "**I** was 'standing behind the door' when God gave out spiritual gifts."

Ephesians says:

*<sup>7</sup>...each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift... <sup>11</sup>The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup>to equip the **saints** for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ....*

It doesn't say "one in a million" receives a spiritual gift to build up the Body. It says, "**each** of us was given grace...." God gives spiritual gifts **to** us to be given **through** us to the community of faith and to the world. Something I love about our calendar of commemorations is that it doesn't only include people from Biblical **salvation** history. It includes people from **world** history and **U.S.** history and people who lived so recently that their lifetimes have overlapped with ours.

Along with Florence Nightingale we remember Clara Maas on August 13. She was a Garden State saint, a Lutheran born in East Orange, a woman who nursed soldiers in the Spanish-American War, in the Philippines, in Cuba, primarily caring for those who suffered from tropical diseases. She bravely volunteered for a research study tracking the role of mosquitoes in spreading yellow fever and died as a result. Both she and Florence Nightingale are remembered as "renewers of society," as is Albert Schweitzer, whom God also blessed with the gifts of healing and compassion. So it's not just people from the Bible, martyrs and evangelists, theologians, pastors and deaconesses who are remembered on our calendar. It's nurses and physicians, musicians and artists, social workers and scientists, too.

Our most important job as members of this family of faith is to praise God. I always say, if you have time for nothing else, worship. Worship nourishes us so we can leave this place forgiven, joyful, fed, then exit through the "servant's entrance" and go into the world to witness to God's goodness in sending our Savior, proclaiming God's power to save. **Here** we remember what it is to love God "above all else" and **out there** we love our neighbor as ourselves. These are two indispensable halves that make a whole.

That said: do you have any idea what spiritual gift God has given you to share with this community? Everybody has one.... Do you have the gift of belief in the power of prayer and willingness to become an Intercessory Pray-er? The gift of servanthood and willingness to do

**whatever** needs to be done, whether it be weeding or delivering food to the ecumenical pantry or changing light bulbs or helping in the sacristy? The gift of facility with numbers and willingness to serve as a counter? The gift of teaching and willingness to commit to Sunday School or Confirmation Connection? The gift of listening and willingness to be a Stephen Minister? The gift of hospitality and willingness to usher or host a coffee hour? The gift of faith and willingness to tell your faith story to others? The gift of time and willingness to cover the office when Ellen is off or to help in the office when Ellen is in? The gift of physical strength and willingness to transport beds, couches, dressers for the Furniture Bank? The gift of mercy, a compassionate heart and helping hands, to welcome Family Promise guests or serve lunch to the homeless in Asbury Park? The gift of public speaking and willingness to be a lector? The gift of music and willingness to offer your vocal or instrumental talents up in the loft?

Our baptism was not a “one and done” and Christianity is not a bystander religion. For Heaven’s sake,

*“I... beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called....”*

Be who you are, a saint, “someone in whom Christ lives again.” May we live our lives in such a way that someone might say to us, “You’re Christ to me.” Amen

<sup>1</sup>William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (rev. ed., *Daily Study Bible Series*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), p. 150.

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