

“Open the Eyes of My Heart, Lord”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

All Saints' Sunday, November 3, 2013

James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Ephesians 1: 11-23

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11 In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Paul's Prayer

15 I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason ¹⁶I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. ¹⁷I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, ¹⁸so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious

inheritance among the saints,¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power.²⁰ God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.²² And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church,²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Relationships are our living legacies.

Chris Keyser and his family live within a stone's throw of our church

and they have graced Atlanta's theatrical and dance stages for many a year.

Keyser announced that this is his last year

to play Scrooge in the Alliance Theater production of "A Christmas Carol".

Allow me to encourage you to consider attending the Alliance Theater this season

to see Chris Keyser embody Scrooge;

go as well as for the music, the power of good storytelling,

and to be connected with a spirit of grace and generosity.

Ebenezer Scrooge is one of Charles Dickens' most memorable literary characters.

At the end of the book, A Christmas Carol,

Ebenezer Scrooge is remembered by his family and neighbors with fondness,

as people gather to give thanks

for his many good deeds of charity in the community.

Such was not always the case in his life.

Scrooge spent many years and traveled many miles pursuing selfish ambitions

until he dreamed a dream of the return of Jacob Marley,

his deceased accountant partner.

The Ghost of Marley returned from the dead as a specter,

draped in chains, gnashing teeth, offering dire warnings and a glimmer of hope.

The specter bemoaned lost opportunities to make a world of difference,

and advised Scrooge to not make the same mistake.

We pick up the story at a crucial turning point:

*“But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,”
faltered Scrooge...*

“Business!” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again.

“Mankind was my business.

The common welfare was my business;

*charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence
were, all my business.*

*The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water
in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”*

It held up its chain at arm's length,

*as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief,
and flung it heavily upon the ground again.*

*“At this time of the rolling year,” the specter said “I suffer
most.*

*Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my
eyes turned down,*

and never raise them to that blessed Star

which led the Wise Men to a poor abode!

*Were there no poor homes to which its light would have
conducted me!”*

Such relationships are our living legacies.

Humanity is our business.

Connecting ourselves and one another to the holy is our calling.

“...charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence”

are all of our concerns and challenge, our joy and our mission.

What is it that we most remember about the saints that have gone on before us?

We honor their gifts and generosity, their hard work and faithfulness,

their wisdom and the building blocks they left behind

so that others may get a step up and a step ahead.

What unites these legacies which live on and on in our souls

is that they are grounded in building relationships that matter.

On this blessed All Saints' Sunday, consider well

what aspects of your faith walk you want remembered.

What will people remember about you?

give thanks for?

retell in stories and relive in deeds?

The Apostle Paul prayed, saying:

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus

and your love toward all the saints,

*and for this reason I do not cease to give
thanks for you*

as I remember you in my prayers.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ...

may give you a spirit of wisdom

and revelation as you come to know him,

so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened,

*you may know what is the hope to which he
has called you,*

*what are the riches of his glorious inheritance
among the saints,*

*and what is the immeasurable greatness of his
power*

*for us who believe, according to the
working of his great power.*

Paul remembers in prayer those who have gone before him

and those who walk beside him.

We overhear him giving thanks,

recalling their faith in God and love for one another.

He affirms their wisdom, which came from deep within,

and their revelation, which was given by God.

Their living legacy of loving God and one another,

of wisdom and revelation lives on in him;

at its core is the communion of their relationships.

Their story is told again and again,

and here it is 2013 and their faith journey lives on in us.

As surely as day follows night,

2,000 years from now

people of faith will celebrate and remember most

the relationships we build with God and one another.

Such relationships are our living legacies.

Evangelist Billy Graham tells a story about the time he was on an airplane

when the gentleman in the seat in front of him had had one drink too many.

A flight attendant attempted to quiet the obnoxious passenger, saying,

“Sir, did you know that the Reverend Billy Graham is sitting right behind you?”

The rowdy passenger turned around and said,

“Rev. Billy Graham, I went to one of your revivals and it changed my life!”

They say that God dreams of relationships

that foster and transform lives on earth as they do in heaven.

They say that a dream of God came true.

They say it happened in this way:

In 1858, a Sunday School teacher named Mr. Kimball

led a Boston shoe clerk to give his life to Christ.

The shoe clerk, Dwight L. Moody, became an evangelist.

In England in 1879, Dwight Moody awakened evangelistic zeal

in the heart of Frederick B. Meyer, the pastor of a small congregation.

Frederick B. Meyer, preaching to young people on an American college campus,

brought to Christ a student named J. Wilbur Chapman.

J. Wilbur Chapman, engaged in YMCA work,

employed a former baseball player named Billy Sunday to do evangelistic work.

Billy Sunday held a revival in Charlotte, North Carolina.

A group of local men and women were so enthusiastic

afterward

that they planned another Christian campaign,
and brought to Charlotte a preacher named
Mordecai Hamm.

During Mordecai Hamm's revival,

a young man named Billy Graham heard the gospel of
Jesus Christ

and gave his life to Jesus Christ.

My friends, 155 years ago a Sunday School teacher named
Mr. Kimball

invested his life in Christ.

He decided that humanity was his business.

One faithful Christian believed he had the power of the Holy
Spirit

because he was foolish enough to believe that God
said he did.

One person of faith overcame whatever might have held him
back

and gave away the love of God that had been given to
him.

One disciple of Christ wasn't concerned about what others
thought of him,

about being cool, appearing socially acceptable,
quietly fitting in with the mainstream;

instead one follower of Jesus succumbed to the notion
that he should live out his faith
with such integrity and joy and hope
that someone else might see his
witness
and follow, not himself,
but God.

One soul at a time God call us to make

“...charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence”

our concerns and challenge, our joy and our
mission.

They say that “one plus one plus one equals a million.”

Well, one by one by one people of faith have touched millions
of souls.

One by one by one people of faith have dared to take risks,
to dream dreams and live out God’s vision,
to share their faith in such a way that all they
do and say points to God.

These relationships are our living legacies,
and they are a dream come true.

We bear the dreams of God in our hearts and minds, souls
and strength.

Let God open the eyes of your heart;

see what the Lord has in mind for you.

In 1858, there was no way for Mr. Kimball to know
that what he began when he shared his faith
would one day grow to be a light to the nations.

This is the mystery and magic of faith;

this is the breadth and depth of the cross
and the glory of the crown;

this is the power and the promise of
God.

We are a part of something mightier than we,

kingdom builders of the kingdom of God;

yet each one of us here is significant, unique
and special;

everyone of us here is needed, prayed
for, and appreciated;

you are an all-important part of a whole

that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Such relationships are our living legacies.

A short while back the Nuclear Regulatory Commission
(NRC)

brought together a panel of experts from a variety of
fields

to consider what should do about nuclear waste
which remains radioactive for 10,000
years.

The NRC pointed out to panel experts

that we can warn people today about where plutonium
is stored,

the question is

how do we warn people 10,000 years
from now?

The experts considered different types of walls and fences,

but realized that both fall and wear out over time.

Post warning signs?

Languages evolve and change and are forgotten.

Governments and monarchies

often do not last more than a few centuries, at best.

*(Sometimes governments have been known to
shut themselves down...)*

Finally the panel of experts hit upon a solution

which could last for ten millenniums: a priesthood.

A priesthood created and empowered for a higher purpose

would believe in the importance of its message,

share its message with the wider world,

and teach its message from generation
to generation.

Interestingly, neither the NRC nor the panel of experts followed through.

Nothing came of their vision.

However, today we may give thanks

that the Church of Jesus Christ has followed through!

Disciples of Jesus Christ understand that a living priesthood

is created out of an experience of the holy,

out of healthy and healing relationships.

In addition, the experience of the holy must be re-experienced by each generation.

We need to leave behind a living legacy that can be retold and relived.

The holy comes and encounters us, today, in the midst of our lives.

By our experience of the holy

we are commissioned to be a royal priesthood.

By this experience the baptized are different -- set apart! -- from the world.

The church of Jesus Christ is holy because it is different,

set apart and set aside by God as a visible and viable witness to the world.

The apostle Peter wrote, *“Come to him, to the living stone, rejected by human beings, but in God's sight chosen and*

precious; and like living stones be your selves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:4-5)

All people are welcome to become living stones.

Those who do are a royal priesthood,

created by the God of Creation,

welcomed by our confession of faith,

ordained by our baptism,

commissioned by the Bread and
the Cup,

and sent forth to be
shepherds and fisher folk,

sowers and
gatherers, listeners
and teachers.

As a holy priesthood we are to teach and share

the love of God from one generation to the next.

And we shall do so until the millennium comes when we
shall no longer have to do so

because all shall know God, from the least to the
greatest.

Jeremiah spoke for the Lord, saying,

*“I will put my law within them, and I will write it [super-
scribe it] on their hearts;*

and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”
(Jeremiah 31:33)

As a royal priesthood we hand down the covenant of God's
promise

from one generation to another.

This, I believe, is a relationship God seeks and wants.

This relationship shall be super-scribed upon our hearts --
we will all know!

The One who Created and Creates knows our names,

our identities, our stories and our heartaches, our
hopes and dreams,

what we witness through the eyes of our hearts,

and prays for us to have a holy
communion

with God and with one another.

Pray that such a healthy and healing relationship become our
living legacy.

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy
Spirit. Amen!*