

Remember the Saints

[Read Hebrews 11:29-12:2 NRSV]

²⁹By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. ³⁰By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. ³¹By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

³²And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— ³³who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.

³⁵Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. ³⁶Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented— ³⁸of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. ³⁹Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

12Therefore, 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, ²looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Opening Image

We are all on a journey, but we are not alone. A long time ago an all-powerful king was preparing a great banquet. The king sent a dinner invitation to a merchant located in a faraway village. The merchant was thrilled to get the invitation and felt honored, but he was also concerned.

The merchant thought to himself, “Oh my goodness, I’ve never been to see a king! What am I gonna wear? What do I say? Oh no—my table manners! I’m just a simple peasant! I don’t know how to eat in front of a king. What am I gonna do?” The merchant was also concerned about the long journey to the king’s castle.

So, the merchant went out and bought a new outfit that was worthy of such an occasion. He then went to learn about table manners. Finally, he spent some time reading about the king and the concerns of the kingdom. Now the merchant was ready to begin his journey.

He packed some food and supplies on his donkey and took a few of his wares to sell along the way. He was not sure which way to go so he set out for the first nearby village to get directions. But while he was in the village, so many people wanted to buy his products that he sold everything he had. He got so excited that he went home and loaded up more of his wares to sell.

Merchant gets lost

The merchant got caught up in his trading as he went from village to village until he became lost. The merchant eventually lost track of time and almost forgot about the king’s invitation.

King Is Concerned

In the meantime, the king became concerned that the merchant was lost, distracted, or delayed on the journey. The king summoned one of his

servants and sent the servant to find the merchant. The king's servant quickly found the merchant and gently reminded him of the king's invitation.

King's Servant Guides the Merchant

The merchant realized that he had gotten sidetracked with business and set out again on the journey with the king's servant. The merchant asked the king's servant, "Which way seems to be the right path to you?"

The king's servant was an experienced traveler and helped the merchant choose the right paths on the journey. The servant knew people in most of the villages that would offer hospitality to them along their journey.

To the merchant's great surprise, he and the king's servant were greeted not as strangers but as friends at each home they entered. They were given water to wash their feet. They were served bread and wine at the evening meals. They were given comfortable places to rest and sleep. The merchant was most impressed by the meals. He had never tasted anything finer in his life. The bread and wine became for him, food for the journey.

After a long journey the merchant and the king's servant arrived at the gates. They reached their destination. The merchant was filled with joy. Now he would meet the king. He had read about the king and heard that the king was very loving, kind, compassionate, generous, and forgiving.

The merchant turned to thank the king's servant for helping him to arrive safely at his destination, but the servant had quietly disappeared. The merchant was welcomed to the king's banquet and told that the king's servant was sent to help others find their way.

Summary

We are all on a journey, but we are not alone. The King has invited all of us to his heavenly home. But like the merchant, we all have a tendency to get lost along the way. We get wrapped up in the business and cares of the day, and we forget the king's invitation. It happens to all of us. So, thank God for the servants of the king who come alongside us to walk with us, to keep us focused, to keep us on the path.

We are all on a journey, but we are not alone. Many people of faith have travelled the journey before us, many have travelled with us, and many will continue to travel this path after us.

Encountering the Scripture

In our scripture this morning, the writer of Hebrews lists the people of faith that were important to him and his people. People like Rahab the Prostitute, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. He also mentions many who are unknown. Many who suffered greatly for their faithfulness and obedience to God. These people of faith are called saints.

They are ordinary people who have answered God's call. They have been obedient and faithful. I can look back at my own spiritual journey and identify some of the saints that helped me on my way to the kingdom.

My Saints

The most important people of faith for me were **my parents**. They attended church on a regular basis. They were faithful and obedient to God's call on their lives. My dad sang in the choir and taught Sunday School. My mother was the secretary and treasurer for the Sunday School class. They made sure that I was baptized and confirmed in the church.

There were other saints along the way. When I was in college my pastor back home, **Rev. Chip Webb**, stayed in touch with me. We had wonderful Christian conversations. My high school English teacher and Debate coach **Larry Jones** taught me the importance of self-sacrifice and compassion. There were Christian writers like **C S Lewis** that appealed to my intellectual curiosity about God.

As an adult I had 4 UMC pastors: **Randy Waugh, Ken Carter, Susan Hubbard Ewing and Earl Wilson** that helped me to hear my call to ministry and fulfill that call. I was spiritually and intellectually fed by professors like **Rick Lischer, Will Willimon, Richard Hays, Peter Story, Greg Jones, and Stanley Hauerwas** at Duke Divinity School.

I have been encouraged by faithful members of numerous Disciple classes. I have been nourished by faithful members of Pilgrimage and

KAIROS. I have been sustained and sometimes carried by faithful members of this church. You are too numerous to name but you know who you are. So, I take this time to give thanks and remember all the saints who have helped me on my journey.

Saints that have helped you on your journey

Who are the saints who kept you on the road of faith when you got so caught up in the business of the day that you forgot the king's invitation? That merchant would never have made it to the king's palace without the servant's help. Who are the saints who have helped you in your journey towards the king? Take a moment, close your eyes, and think about all the people who have been with you on your journey.

Remember the Saints

Remember the saints who started you on your journey. None of us found God on our own. God came to us through numerous people and voices. Who are the saints who first led you to Christ and the church?

[Pause] Remember the saints and give thanks.

Remember the saints who helped you find your way when you were lost in the wilderness. Think about the many detours that you took on your way to celebrate God's banquet. None of us came out of the wilderness without God's help. Who are the saints who have helped you stay on God's path? *[Pause] Remember the saints and give thanks!*

Remember the saints who continue to guide you on your journey. Think about the times you were weary and ready to give up. Who are the saints who fed you and encouraged you to continue when you thought you could not take another step? *[Pause]* **Remember the saints and give thanks!** In the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Bibliography

- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Wm B. Eerdmans Co., 1982
- Craddock, Fred B. *Hebrews. The New Interpreters Bible Commentary Volume XII*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998
- Griebner, David M. *The Carpenter and the Unbuilder, Stories for the Spiritual Quest*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Press, 1996.

Now let us join together with the community of the saints by confessing our sins and celebrate the great thanksgiving together. Our liturgy tells us, "And so, with all your people on earth and all the company of heaven." When we receive communion, we are mystically joined with all the saints across time, space, and eternity.