

**Message Delivered at Christ Church**  
**Sunday, November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2011; All Saints' Sunday**  
**TEXT: Matthew 5:1-12**  
**Delivered by Paul A. Johnson**

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*The message was preceded by the reading from Matthew, according to the King James Version of the Bible.*

So if that Gospel reading sounds a little bit different than what you have in your bulletin, that's because it is. That was the King James Version of the Beatitudes. I read it from this Bible, which belonged to my grandmother. My grandmother died in 1986, and soon after her death I asked my dad if I could have her Bible. And when he was ready, he was kind enough to give it to me.

It's always kind of fun to have a book that belonged to someone else, especially a Bible. There's a list here in my grandmother's handwriting of births, and deaths, and marriages. There are passages noted, which always make you wonder why someone marked this rather than that...was it something the pastor had said, or was it something going on in her own life that caused her to mark what she marked? In the margin of this particular reading she wrote the word "humble" next to "blessed are the poor in spirit because theirs is the kingdom of heaven." It fits the text, but one wonders how it fit her life...

My grandmother's name was Gertrude...Gertrude Marilla Schau. Her parents had gotten married in Germany in the morning, and that afternoon were on a boat to the United States. They settled on the south side of Chicago with a bunch of other Germans. She was the fifth born of their six children...the first girl.

She was twenty-one when she married my grandfather...a man named Alvin Johnson; twenty-two when my dad was born; and twenty-four when she gave birth to my aunt. My grandfather spent forty years making a living as a shipping clerk with a company called International Harvester. And my grandmother lived the kind of life open at that time to a woman married to a working man. She cared for her husband, who needed a lot of care. She raised her children. Her entire family lived within a few blocks of one another, and she care for them much, as well.

Her education stopped at high school, but she was very astute. Not much got by her. There's lots of politics in big families, and she mostly knew how to negotiate the complexities...what was possible; what wasn't; what should be said; what should not be said...

She grew up in the Church. But there's an apocryphal story in my family that the church in which she grew up rejected her. You see, her husband was of a rival denomination; and when she told the pastor of her church she was going to marry him the pastor told her that she would never be welcome in the doors of the church again. Legend has it in our family that this conversation took place on the front steps of the church; and there and then my grandmother made her decision, and walked off to marry my grandfather. How much of that story is legend, and how much of that story is fact, is something I don't know. I do know that there is always some fact in every language.

Regardless, she was always faithful. She and my grandfather always worshiped. They passed it on to their children, who passed it on to their children.

Growing up, they lived about a half hour away from us. We saw them about once a month. And she made these certain kinds of yeast rolls that made your mouth water. Moments

after my coat was off, I'd eat one warm with butter. And it was at Grandma's house that I could have a Coke with dinner. In other words, she was the perfect Grandma.

Well, y'all...today is All Saints' Day. It's an ancient feast which came into existence because there were so many saints recognized by the Church that remembrance for their lives needed to be lumped into a single day. Protestantism adopted it, and transformed it, so that it has become a day when we remember not so much the front page saints, but those who have been saints in our own lives; not necessarily people powerful or broadly influential, but the people who have touched us and now celebrate the promises God makes. You see, in scripture the word "saint" was used to refer to all the faithful...me, and you, and the person sitting next to you who works through, and struggles with, the same things we all do; who carry their crosses daily with little fanfare...our friends, our spouses, our children, our parents, our grandpas and grandmas.

Those are the saints we celebrate today...the ones with us and the ones who have gone before. So this is the great connecting feast of the Church, when we celebrate how those who have gone before us have brought us along; and how the Lord has given us, one to another.

You could name scores of saints who have passed it on to you. So could I...Bernadette; our sons; my parents; my sisters and brother; and bunches of wise, and faithful, and loving friends who have shared faith and generosity.

But here's why Grandma Johnson is the saint I proclaim today. It's not going to sound like much, but often it's the simplest things that matter most...

She was the world's best bedtime prayer hearer. My dad heard my prayers every night he was home; my mom when he was away; sometimes, my sisters--but Grandma...she was the best. She knelt down next to my bed; and got close so I could smell the Grandma on her; and folded her hands and closed her eyes; and she'd listen to me say my prayers; and then, she always added on. Her voice was always warm, but it was especially warm with bedtime prayers. Prayer was an effortless and comfortable home for her. She had a way of saying the word "God" that made God present and showed that she loved God and she knew God loved her. And when she prayed, she always smiled said gentle things, always asked God to bless mom and dad and my sisters and brother, and always prayed that God would protect me through the night and give me sweet dreams. She'd kiss me good night; and when she was done, I just knew that God would do exactly as she asked.

And so...to the degree that God's love and mercy and compassion are real in my life, one who gave a first witness to these truths is my grandmother...simply, through how she prayed; such a small thing.

That was how she was a saint, at least to me. But there are as many ways to be a saint as there are saints...prayer; service; truth-telling; hand-holding; encouragement...countless ways that saints touch us.

So it's All Saints Day; and I'm just going to ask you...who's been a saint for you? Who are those people that brought you along? Who are your saints? Who have they been? We remember them, and we're remembering that none of us stand alone; that we stand on the shoulders of giants, even if those giants were as diminutive as my five foot grandmother. If we enjoy the good fortune that any of those saints are still walking this earth, a great way to celebrate this feast is thank them.

And I'm just going to ask you...who needs you to be a saint? We have all received. We aren't cut out of whole cloth. I've said this quote before, but will say it again...that it was Tertullian who said "Christians aren't born. They're made." Someone helped make us; and then

we help in the making. So who is it...who are they...who are looking to receive a blessing from you? There's somebody who want us to pass it on.

We look forward, just as we look backwards. We remember those who have gone before us on All Saints Day. And then we look ahead to those who follow. So we help God do some saint making today. It's the best way to observe All Saints.' Bode; Cooper; Matt; Jacob; Logan; Grant; Sawyer; Tommy; Liam...all get baptized this morning...all boys this time...a manly baptism...and today is when their sainthood begins; we welcome them in to the community of saints and the household of God. Their sponsors take on responsibilities to guide them and nurture them; and as always, so do we. Because, saints be praised, God gives us the opportunity to pass it on. We're the ones who will teach them how to pray, how to serve, how to worship and be the Church. They'll learn that God loves them all the time from their parents, and their sponsors, and their grandparents...and they'll learn it from us and from all the saints.

And then, they'll pass it on. If it's a race we run, as the Apostle Paul said in his letters, then it's a relay race. We receive the baton; but we don't just keep it. We pass it on.

Look around this congregation. Look at the people around you. We named some of our saints before worship. And in a few minutes, we help God make a few more saints. But this feast is the feast of all the saints, so if you want to see what a saint looks like just look around.

Now turn to the person sitting next to you and tell them "You're a saint..."

And then, when you get home, look in the mirror to see what another saint looks like. It's you. Already, it's each of us. In a moment, we'll pledge to do all in our power to support these persons in their life in Christ. And through God's Spirit, we're a mighty powerful group...receivers and givers; pray-ers and servers...all God's people...the communion of saints here and beyond here...all following the One who makes us right. All the saints, marching in.

We're in that number. Now, let's help God add to it, and do some baptizing...