

For Such A Time As This: Heritage

Luke 6:47-49

Rev. Nancy S. Lynn

November 5, 2023

Hello, my friends:

I am very sad to not be with you on this day when we celebrate the lives of those saints in our church who have passed away this year. I am in Washington state to celebrate a saint from my own life. My wonderful friend, Juli, with whom I have shared the journey of ministry since we were in seminary, passed away from cancer a couple of months ago. Before her death, she asked me to officiate her memorial service so that is what I'm doing this weekend.

Still, I wanted to take a few minutes to talk about All Saints' Day and about the start of our annual giving campaign. Our theme for our giving campaign is "For Such A Time As This". That phrase comes from the Book of Esther. If you're not familiar with the story, Esther is a young Jewish woman living in Persia. Because of her great beauty, she finds favor with the Persian king and ultimately becomes queen. Meanwhile, one of the king's court officials, Haman, has convinced the king to order the execution of all of the Jews in the Empire. Esther's uncle, Mordecai, pleads with her to use her influence with the king to stop this massacre. It's a big ask. Anyone who goes to the king, even his wife, without being summoned may be killed on the spot, so she is rightfully scared to do what Mordecai has asked of her. Mordecai convinces her saying, "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews... Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." Mordecai's suggestion that God may have placed her in this unlikely position for a purpose motivates Esther to overcome her fear and meet with the king. In the end, she is successful in stopping the massacre of her people.

Throughout history, God's people have stepped up in difficult times to make an impact in a broken world. The Christian Church, though it has a messy history, has been a force for good in so many times of crisis. To be an alternative to a life of oppression in the Roman Empire, to bring peace in times of war, to be a place of safety and refuge for escaped slaves, to offer relief in times of natural disaster around the world, to be a source of love and comfort for people looking for acceptance and solace, to sometimes be the only hope people have in the darkness of their lives.

We all know that we are living in challenging times. I don't need to list off for you all the things that have caused upheaval in our country and world over the last five years. What I will do is lift up my vision that First United Methodist Church of Ann Arbor exists for such a time as this. We need our church and so does our world. We have the love and the resources to be a haven of hope, an example of faith in action, a source of stability and strength to each other and to our community and beyond.

That is part of our identity - who we are and who we have always been. Our church is nearing its 200th anniversary. In those 200 years, we have shaped the faith of countless youth and children who have gone on to make an impact for good in the world. We have offered each other lifetime friendships, new insights, a cup of tea in a crisis. We have come together for worship and potlucks, Bible study and concerts. We've made hundreds, maybe thousands, of lunches for

people who are food insecure. We've picketed city hall for fair housing and held weekly peace lunches in which folks learned about different conflicts in the world. We've built a school in Kenya and lugged concrete for orphanage walls in Costa Rica. We are a people who believe that Jesus taught us to love and care for everyone, to feed the hungry, offer water to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the poor, care for the sick, visit the prisoner.

Which brings me to the importance of All Saints' Day. This church is built on the foundation of the saints who have gone before us. People who absorbed the teachings of Jesus and put them into practice. Now it is our turn to continue their legacy - to sustain this place and our ministries for today's world and tomorrow's and to be saints to each other and to the next generation.

We all have people in our lives who have taught us what it means to be a Christ-follower. Today, we celebrate the lives of thirteen of those folks who have been important role models, friends, servant leaders in the life of the church. Among them is Jim Crippen who was our longest member having been baptized here as a baby and living to just shy of age 99. Jim served in virtually every volunteer capacity in this church during his lifetime. He also was deeply involved in the Methodist church as a whole and was present when the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Evangelical United Brethren joined together to become the United Methodist Church in 1968. He gave his time, his legal expertise, his love, and a significant proportion of his income to this church because he believed in the importance of what we do here.

Other saints in this group have been great supporters of our youth and music programs, edited the church newsletter, been president of the UMW, worked to oversee our work at Alpha House and our Christmas giving tree program, taught Sunday School, sat on committees, prayed for our church and our world, and countless other offerings of time, energy, faith, and money.

Each of them had an impact on someone in our church, our community, our world. Each of them stepped up at some point in their lives for such a time as this.

So, who have been those people, either living or dead, in this church for you? Today, you have the opportunity to share the name of someone in our church family who has impacted your faith in some important way. We're asking you to write their name on a heart card and put the card in the offering plate as it is passed. If you're online, there is a form on the church website you can use. Whichever way you choose to do it, you can write just the person's name, or you can add a bit about how and why they have been important to your faith journey. At the end of the service, Jenaba will share a few of the cards with you and then we'll put them up, along with cards from our children and youth, as well, where everyone can see them.

Today, we give thanks for all the saints in our lives, for these thirteen people so dear to this congregation, and for the presence of our church for such a time as this.

May it be so. Amen.