

“Who Wants to be in a Parade?”

A meditation based on Ruth 1:1-8; Hebrews 11:1-2, 29-12:2; Mark 12:28-34

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Redlands United Church of Christ

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A few nights ago, I had my very first ever karaoke experience. For those uneducated like myself, karaoke involves public singing, with the lyrics flashed on a small screen, and the musical accompaniment playing underneath. Would-be singers parade up to the mic and the rest is pure fun! While others at the party were freely going up to the waiting microphones, I found myself hesitant, unusually shy, even embarrassed by the insistence of my friends that I partake in this musical parade. I now spend so much of my life in front, that, from time to time, it is a pleasant change to be in the crowd! Yes, I love parades as much as anyone else...but I especially love them from curbside, standing safely on the sideline, out of the limelight.

Yet there was that one Christmas parade, way back in my early childhood, right down the main street of my hometown of Hemet. Knowing that her 5-year old daughter wanted to be in this parade, my busy mother had quickly thrown together an easy costume. And I proudly walked down Florida Avenue as a little wrapped present, bright red hair, red tights, and a bigger-than-life box resting on my shoulders, all covered with holiday paper! For that costume I won 2<sup>nd</sup> prize, and my box was adorned with the beautiful red ribbon. I remember being so proud that I'd won a red ribbon—rather than a blue one—because the red one matched my packaging perfectly, and, at the conclusion of the parade, that bright red ribbon gave me quick access to the front of the line to sit on Santa's lap.

Today we can bask in happy memories of joyful parades, for on this combined celebration of Dia de los Muertos and All Saints Day we are invited to be acutely aware of that ever-present parade of saints and witnesses that surround us all the time. Our scripture readings also help us clear our eyes and focus our vision so we can better appreciate their presence and, from recalling God's work in their lives, we can find strength for our own journeys.

We read this morning of Ruth, who stands faithfully by her now-disenfranchised mother-in-law Naomi. Call it determination, stubbornness, or faithful love...there is a candy corn kernel of truth in each description of this saint of a daughter-in-law!

The unnamed scribe in the gospel reading is also a saint of sorts, although I've never heard him referred to as such. His courage in asking Jesus a difficult question—which commandment was the most important out of the 600+ every Jewish person was required to follow—this question provided the setting for what is arguably the most important teaching left to us from Jesus. In characteristic form, in his response Jesus changes the tone of the question from legal to relational. "What is most important in your faith journey?" Jesus, in effect, asks the scribe. "Love God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength...AND Love your neighbor as you love yourself." And with that simple question posed by this saint of a scribe, we are blessed recipients of a religion whose meaning is love.

The Book of Hebrews, when read in conjunction with these other two passages, is a veritable parade of saints! We read this morning of the Hebrew tribe, who put one muddy foot in front of the other, hoping to cross to dry land and freedom. We read of the marching trumpeters, who kept playing and hoping that Jericho's walls would fall. We read of a prostitute by the name of Rahab—one of the ancestors of Jesus himself—who gave sanctuary

to two spies sent by Joshua to check out the region of Jericho. We read of Gideon, to whom God appeared and who reminded his people of God's abiding presence. We read of Barak—a commander of the Hebrew army, and of Jephthah—a mighty warrior. Of Samson—whose physical muscle was used to give the Hebrews victory over the Philistines. In this parade are David and his son out of wedlock Samuel and all the prophets. An inclusive parade, we hear of women and men, old and young, Hebrew and Gentile, who endured and lived and suffered for the sake of their faith journeys. Their lives and their actions are a chronicle of faith, not necessarily because they were such faithful or perfect people, but because through their living, we see the faithfulness of God. By looking back these many generations—to these so-called “saints”—we can see that faith is the assurance of things we hope for. The truth that God worked through their lives says to us that God will work through our lives, too. Today, perhaps more obviously than on other Sundays in the church year, I hope we can see that a saint is simply a person—human like us—who faithfully (not always perfectly) faithfully loves God and loves neighbor as self.

What a parade beckons us! Today we are invited by God to confidently join the parade of saints that swirls around us all the time! Author Marianne Williamson, writing in her 1992 book, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of A Course in Miracles*, has been criticized for her simplistic application of love to the challenging task of healing. More enduring than her specific contributions to the field of health and healing, is the following poem found in her book. I invite you to hear in it what we have heard today in scripture: that saints are those very human people who faithfully—not necessarily perfectly—who faithfully love God and love neighbor as self. Ms. Williamson writes,

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.

Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.

It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be?

You are a child of God.

Your playing small doesn't serve the world.

There's nothing enlightened about shrinking  
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We are all meant to shine, as children do.

We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone.

And as we let our own light shine,  
we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.

As we are liberated from our own fears,  
our presence automatically liberates others."

Who of us doesn't love a parade?! Come, friends, for you were born wrapped like a darling little Christmas package with legs, and you are still every bit the saint God created you to be. Take a risk with me and join this saintly parade before it passes us by!

Amen and Blessed Be!