

All Saints Sunday

Elisha Heals Naaman

Narrative Lectionary Year 1, Week 9

November 2, 2014

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD

Readings: Matthew 8: 2-3; 2 Kings 5: 1-15a

Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit –Amen

Saint Giles, Saint Mungo, Saint Columba, St. Vigean. I ran into these saints in Scotland. I didn't recall ever hearing about any of them. When I arrived home to write a sermon for All Saints Sunday, I thought it the perfect opportunity to discover who they were — share a bit of Scotland with you.

The patron saint of Edinburgh is St. Giles, who never visited Scotland. He was a popular saint in the Middle Ages. The patron saint of cripples and lepers. Ironically St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh is the “Mother Church of Presbyterianism” where John Knox made his significant mark during the Reformation.

St. Mungo, also known as St. Kentigern, was born in Scotland though under the shadow of royal illegitimacy. Mungo means “dear one” and is thought to have been given to him by the priest, mentor and teacher who raised him. Living an austere, simple life during the 6th century, Mungo worked to spread the gospel in what is now Glasgow in the 6th century. He would lead efforts to building a church in Glasgow, where he was later named bishop. He remains the patron saint of Glasgow, whose coat of arms contains symbols of miracles attributed to Saint Mungo. The Cathedral currently on the site where he built a church, is no longer Catholic but the Church of Scotland.

Saint Columba came to Scotland via Ireland after a bit of trouble which nearly got him excommunicated. He landed on the island of Iona in 563 AD, where he would establish a monastic community and center of scholastic study. But Columba's missionary zeal took him into the Scottish Highlands and his name kept popping up all over the place. This was one busy guy. He founded churches, acted as a diplomat among the Picts and clans. Legend claims he even banished a ferocious water beast to the Loch Ness.

Saint Vigean turns out not to be a saint. Rather, Vigean, may be the Latinized version of Saint Feichin, who was an Athenian-born abbot who lived out his life in what

would be France during the 7th century. He also never visited Scotland. The best guess is that one of St. Feichin's followers, who later did missionary work in Scotland, encouraged the use of his teacher's name for a church and its surrounding village.

It seems the "saints of Scotland" aren't primarily Scottish at all. Even Scotland's patron saint, St. Andrew, came into that country in a peculiar way. St. Andrew, one of Jesus' original 12 apostles, was martyred on an "X" shaped Roman cross. Later, when the now-converted Emperor Constantine was about to move the remains of St. Andrew, a monk said an angel told him to take all the remains of St. Andrew he could for safe keeping to "the ends of the earth." Guess where he imagined the "ends of the earth" was? So a tooth, arm bone, kneecap and several fingers of St. Andrew came to Scotland and St. Andrew came to be Scotland's patron saint. The large "X" on Scotland's flag came from that Roman cross St. Andrew was martyred upon — which might make you think twice when you see that white on blue cross painted on the faces and bodies of Scottish sports fans.

My adventure into the saints of Scotland didn't quite lead where I hoped. I was looking for inspiring stories of people whose lives reflected the light of God and who still inspired others to follow Jesus. Instead, these "saints" seemed to be all tied up in the legends and traditions of a nation with their zeal for God and God's Word an "aside," a mere footnote.

I was looking in the wrong place for the "saints of Scotland" when I focused on those with that church-designated title. Instead, I should tell you about Sandra who lived at the foot of the church in St. Vigean's. She was unloading groceries from her car when my friend and I were looking at the marked describing the beautiful church on the hill. "Did you want to see the church? Are you on holiday?" she asked in this beautiful brogue. When we said that would be lovely. She said she'd let us in as soon as she got her groceries in the house. She was an active member of the church and entrusted with a key. She hated to see folks interested in the church turned away, so she would let them in when she could. She walked up the hill with us, unlocked the church, turned on the lights, gave us some orientation and history. She invited us to stay as long as we wanted. Then she asked us to turn off the lights, lock the door and put the key in her mail slot when we were done. I don't know if I was as impressed by the building as I was at her kindness and trust. It was the hospitality and welcome of Jesus I saw in Saint Sandra.

Or I could tell you about St. Harry, who offered to let two Yank ladies sit at one of

his few café tables for several hours as we waited to see if the bridge connecting the island of Skye to the mainland would re-open in several hours. Or I should mention the Asiatic managers of a Scottish B 'n B who graciously navigated across several languages to help us reclaim to the rental car keys I left in a coffee café our first day in Edinburgh.

“Saint” in its common usage, means those who live perfect lives of goodness. I may be wrong, but I think Jesus was the only one to do that. The “saints” we celebrate today are those who doubted, stumbled, struggled and yet let God hold fast to them. The “saints” we celebrate today are God’s children who just tried their best to honor God with kindness, mercy, hospitality, generosity and repentance when they failed. The saints we celebrate today are not just those who have joined Jesus in the Church Triumphant but us ---- simultaneously saints and sinners, claimed by our Lord in baptism and empowered by the Holy Spirit to do our best to live lives that honor God with kindness, mercy, hospitality, generosity and repentance when we fail. Most saints are not high-profile figures but our moms and dads, grandparents, husbands or wives, neighbors or friends, fellows church member or sometimes a complete stranger through whom God works — maybe sometimes, even with out that person being fully aware.

The story we read today has lots of high profile and powerful folks: Naaman, a military commander of Aram; the kings of Aram and Israel, God’s prophet Elisha. Yet who does God use to make the cure of a diseased foreigner possible? A young, Israelite woman — the spoils of war — who still tells her mistress of one who could cure the man who holds her a slave. The prophet’s servant who bravely delivers Elisha’s simple, curt message to a powerful man with great expectations. And Namaan’s own servants who found a convincing way to suggest he might as well try the seven dips in the Jordan after coming all this way. Through the Lord working through them, It turns out that it is not only Naaman’s skin that was changed. He comes to believe the God of Israel is the one true God. Holy and healing things can happen through some of the most unlikely, humble folks. We don’t need to visit Scotland or look far to find a saint --- you only need to look in the mirror, look across the church, look in the eyes of a stranger who helps. On this side of eternity, we can still be stinkers and sinners sometimes. But when we let the love of God have its way in us, the saint will step up and out.

I’m sure saints Giles, Mungo, Columba, Vigean and Andrew had their moments when God’s light’s shone through them and God’s work was done by their hands. But

God's light and work was also seen in the lives of our dear Jan Kaplan, Vivian Dean, Joe Staley, Kitty Minnick.... it was seen in Amy's Mom, Paula, and Dave's Mom, Katherine, in Sarai's brother Joe (*on his better days* :))... it can be seen in you and I. That's how it is for those who, each day, still find themselves a bit damp from their baptism and marked by the cross of Christ forever. A saint is part of who we are created to be. Let it be so. The peace and power of the Lord be with you, saints of God. Amen

Linda M Alessandri 11/2/14

**Information about the saints was collected from a variety of on-line reference resources.*