

All Saints Sunday
Kingdom Divided
Narrative Lectionary Year 2, Week 8
November 1, 2015
Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown MD
Readings Mark10:42-45; 1 Kings 12: 1-17, 25-29

Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit –Amen It is really a rather simple idea. Pull your car into the lot, trunk facing the center of the lot. Bring a chair to sit in and lots of candy to hand out to costumed children. And while we do that, we have loving interaction with the kids and their parents. This year the confirmation class added some creepiness by inviting kids to my haunted backyard. And, like we have done for a while, we had a fire pit going for roasting marshmallows for the making of those ultra sweet s'mores treats. It doesn't seem like an earth-changing thing to do. Jesus say, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve." Then you see Trunk or Treat a bit differently: Followers of Jesus giving up time, using resources to buy candy, shivering in the cold when they could be in the warmth of their homes so that they can extend kindness to strangers and give the grace of God a loving, human face.

While she and her children made s'mores, a mom let us know her two children were being blessed by two of Haven's Micah backpacks. She was grateful for the food, the care to make it as healthy as possible and the little notes of encouragement we place in them. Several adults leaving the Al-anon meeting were encouraged to come make s'mores and did. As they enjoyed being included, I remembered the four or five Al-anon support groups that meet here at Haven. They may speak of "High Power" but the listening, encouragement, and love they offer each other is pure Jesus. It's good to open our doors, share our space and utilities with such ministries. "I did not come to be served but to serve," Jesus said and it's been God's way all along. God love is always other-centered. God's power is never coercive. The kings of Israel didn't always remember that.

King David's son, Solomon, started out well. He asked for the gift of wisdom. He built the Temple in Jerusalem. But Solomon REALLY came to like being king and the comforts and prestige his power afforded him. He had big and extensive building projects, a large harem with foreign wives he indulged, and an extravagant life style. His policies were taxingly expensive and demanded many Israelites to become forced laborers. When King Solomon died, the people came to his son Rehoboam hoping he would offer them some relief from such oppressive policies. "Lighten our yoke and we will serve you," they implored. It's a pivotal moment in the history of this united nation of twelve tribes. Will

Rehoboam choose to be a shepherd king who sees his duty to care for his flock and their being or will he choose to wield power like a club to benefit himself?

The king consults two sets of advisers. The elders who have the advantage of hindsight and the clarity it provides. They tell him to be a servant king, one who champions the welfare of the people, and shows respect and care in how he addresses them. Do this, they say, and the people will loyally follow and faithfully serve their king. Rehoboam didn't like this advice and he asked his contemporary cronies what they would advise. They advise the way of domination and oppression Show them you're in control, threaten them, and let them know you are even more potent and dangerous then your father ever was. This is the advice Rehoboam elects and boldly proclaims. The people of Israel grieve his refusal to change and the escalation of oppressive policies. Here they are, descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and God's covenant with them, but it means nothing to the king. They leave for their tents like those Hebrew slaves who fled Egypt years before. Rehoboam's choice doesn't win him control. It divides the kingdom. The ten northern tribes cede and choose former Solomon adviser, Jeroboam as their king. They call themselves Israel. Rehoboam is left with the land of Judah and Benjamin, the southern portion of the kingdom, which will now be called Judah.

Power is seductive. To secure and exert that power, leaders will silence rather than listen; take rather than give, overwhelm rather than uplift. We see it in our own times, in local, state, national and international leaders, in schools and businesses, where "those in charge" put maintaining their position and power above the welfare of those they govern. It's dangerous. It's contrary to God's way of servant leadership which Jesus modeled for us in his own life. "I did not come to be served but to serve."

At our baptism, we were called into the work of God. In Scripture, "a saint is a member of the baptized community of God." As a child of God we are commissioned to be God's incarnate presence in the world. Today we remember those saints of our lives who have joined the church triumphant on the longer side of eternity. We remember how they gave flesh to God's love and non-bullying power. Today we also remember that we are the saints of God, too — "not flawless nor free of troubles, questions or doubts, but nevertheless God's saints." [Each of us is] "a wondrous mixture of stars and dirt and all that is right and wrong with humankind. Yet in the mix of all that, there is something of the image of Christ to be seen. Through that mixture, Christ can speak to us. Through that mixture, God's love can come to us. Through sometimes unlikely, even sometimes unsaintly saints, God visits us and loves us and cares for us."¹ Through us, sometimes

unlikely, even sometimes unsaintly saints, God visits others and loves others and cares for others: with cans of vegetables, and peanut butter and jelly for food baskets; with calls to people who aren't in worship to see if they need anything; by sending cards and bringing meals to those facing health challenges; by listening to each other, offering tissues and hugs when needed; by providing food and serving a meal to the homeless at Reach; by offering rides to church or doctors' appointments; by being kind, helpful and thoughtful because that's just the way saints of God have grown to be as they follow Jesus.

In the oppressive system of apartheid in South Africa a black person was expected to step off the pavement into the gutter to allow a white person to pass, as a demeaning gesture of respect to the white person. A little boy and his mother were black and walking down the street when a tall white man, dressed in a black suit, came toward them. Before the boy and his mother could step off the sidewalk, as was expected of them, the man stepped off the sidewalk. As he passed, the man tipped his hat in a gesture of respect to the woman.

The boy was more than surprised at what had happened and asked his mother, "Why did that white man do that? His mother explained, "He's an Anglican priest. He's a man of God, that's why he did it." The boy decided then and there that he wanted to be an Anglican priest. And what is more, he wanted to be a man of God." That boy grew to be Nobel Prize winner Desmond Tutu, one of the most respected voices for racial harmony and human dignity in the struggle that brought apartheid down and helped forge a more just nation.² "I did not come to be served but to serve," Jesus said. Standing up for what is right, just and loving is how saints of God have served and still do.

Rehoboam and later, Jeroboam, turned away from God's way and calling and became agents of injustice and self-serving privilege. The lure of power, prestige, wealth and elitism is potent and pervasive, dangerously leading to self-centeredness, demeaning others and destructiveness. The united nation of Israel divided into two — Israel and Judah. Both would be conquered and ruled by other nations. To the average person, Trunk or Treat, tipping one's hat, welcoming a guest in church, expressing thanks, being considerate may not seem to have the magnitude of influence on the world as the a king or elected leader. But God often works through the lowly, the weak, the sinning saint, in small and great ways to bring the healing kingdom of God to earth. In your baptism, through Christ Jesus, you are one of those saints God is counting on. Turn to your neighbor and say, "Praise God, I'm saint _____" — fill in your own name. Don't be shy. "Praise God, I'm saint _____. *(After a few moments)* Thanks be to God. Amen

ENDNOTES

1. Bradley Call, "All Saints" posted on GoodPreacher.com

2. Tony Campolo, Let Me Tell You a Story Nashville: Word Publishing 2000, pp 160-161