

“Who Knows You?”

I John 3:1-3; Revelation 7:9-17

November 2, 2014

Mary Taylor Memorial United Methodist Church, Milford, Connecticut

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Who knows you? To observe All Saints, as we do today, is to remember those whom we have known and loved, who now rest from their labors. Most of us hope that, when our time comes to die, others will remember us and our lives with love and thanksgiving.

Yet how well do we really allow others to know us? Time and again a person of prominence is revealed to have a significant flaw of character or behavior. We shake our heads and say, “Well, I guess you never really know someone.” This seems the reason for the existence of some of the tabloids and TMZ, to dig up or make up dirt on folks.

Sadly, too often the dirt arrives with no effort to find it. Nearly a decade ago my colleague, Earle Sanford, surrendered his clergy credentials—“defrocked” is the old term—after admitting the truth of allegations of sexual misconduct with parishioners he was counseling: public information that made the front page of at least one area newspaper. It is impossible to calculate the spiritual and emotional impact on the women he counseled and whose trust he betrayed; on his wife and adult daughters; on his congregation at the time and the many he had served before. I can remember talking with colleagues and saying “Well, I guess you never really know someone.”

One wonders about the poor woman struck by an Amtrak train west of the Milford train station on Monday. Who knew her? Was there no one she could have spoken to before standing on the tracks?

Who knows you? Who knows me? Part of why we are in the church, I think, is to be honest with God in a way that we may not be honest with any other human being. It is why we have prayers of confession. We are not always all we are perceived to be. Sometimes that becomes painfully and publicly apparent. Other times, we hide our sins to our secret shame.

Please do not think saying these words gives me pleasure. I would much rather regale you with funny stories. I often do. Yet sometimes the reality of sin—especially for the idealistic among us—is crushing. I often wish I could shrug it off with “Well, that’s just how people are.”

But the vision God holds for us is so much more. In the vision of heaven in today’s reading from Revelation, the writer sees those who have been saved, the Elect of God, and is asked by an elder “Who are these...and where have they come from?” The writer answers the elder, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” The elder goes on to say that, indeed, he does: they are the elect who have endured suffering but now “will hunger no more, and thirst no more....and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

We remember this morning those who, we trust in faith, have gone on to glory with God. Were they perfect? Not in this life. But that they were faithful is a hope we hold on to, for their sake and ours, since none of us is perfect, either.

How God sorts all of this out I haven’t a clue. I only know that the truth that God “is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” is a trust that scripture affirms again and again.

We sometimes wonder “How bad do you have to be, to go to hell, to be eternally alienated from God?” We also wonder “How much good must you do to make it to heaven?” Yet these are dead-end questions. We can never answer them, at least not in this life.

Must we then wait for heaven—assuming that we make it to that side of the great divide—to have the reassurance that, in the end, we will “hunger no more and thirst no more....and God will wipe away every tear from *our* eyes?”

No. The reading from First John that was our call to worship says that God, knowing us in all our finitude and imperfection has nonetheless called us “children of God; and that is what we are.”

Children of God, that is what we are...sinew and spirit, muscle and metaphysics, chemicals and courage, physical and faithful...in our mortal, our all too mortal bodies, is the revelation of the divine.
Children of God.

And as children of God we are known by God. And being known by God in the totality of our being—which is to say the totality of our imperfections—we are loved by God. Warts and all. Imperfections and all. Because we are loved, we are never the same. We, too, must love. Even in the face of sin and shame, of heartache and hurt.

Easy? Well, let's just say it's easier than surrendering to hate and evil. As we remember these saints today, and as we receive the holy Sacrament, may we remember that we have a divine pedigree: children of God. Heady stuff to live up to. And worth every ounce of prayer and sweat to do it. But we don't do it alone. We do it with the help of God whose children we are. Amen.