

Title: “Saints are Made, not Born”

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Revelation 7:9-10; 1 John 3:1-3

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Service Readings: Rev 7:9-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matt 5:1-12

Saints are made by God's grace, not born, and are created through faith in Jesus Christ. Today we challenge believers to share God's love and Word with all people, even those difficult to love, serving as instruments of God to bring others into His family regardless of their background or differences.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

⁹After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Jesus died for all. Every nation, every race, every people, every social class. None are excluded. His saving work was accomplished for all – none are excluded. And in this way, the Christian faith is known to be completely inclusive. All are called in his victory of salvation. But just as this gift is vastly inclusive, it is also, at the same time, vastly exclusive. For the salvation that he offers is *only* available to those who believe in his death and resurrection. There is no other way in which one can share in the reward he won. There is no alternate path to heaven that excludes Jesus.

Now, we can talk about the reasons why so many reject the gift of grace that God offers, but this morning we remember the saints that have gone before us, those from every nation, every race, every social class. And even more personal, we remember those who we loved that are right now standing before the throne, in the very presence of God. And we can ask, “How did they get there?”

The simple answer, and a correct one at that, is that they believed in Jesus. They held firm in their faith that Jesus took their sins to the cross, endured the judgement of the father, and received forgiveness. They believed that salvation was not by their work, not by what they were born into, not by anything within themselves but was a gift of God's grace.

They understood that saints are made, not born.

Saints are made, not by human work, but by God's gracious work. They are made by the power of his word, mixed with the water of baptism. In that moment they are cleansed from all their sins, washed in the blood of Jesus' sacrifice, and adopted into the family of God. In that moment they are made saints, saints worthy of confidently entering the throne room of God and standing in his presence.

Yes, saints are made. Saints are made *by God*. But in his creative wisdom, he uses *us* as instruments of his work. Those who stand before the throne in heaven, and even those who are alive today in faith did

not come to the knowledge of Jesus on their own. It was through someone who shared the Word of God with them. It was through someone who saw the problem of sin and brought them into the knowledge and the love of Christ. And as we think about those we love we can think about the love that we have for them: the love of a parent or a spouse, but make no mistake, it was the love of God, and only the love of God that has truly made them saints.

And I say all of this because human love can at times be hard. As parents, you can recall the times in your lives where loving your child was difficult. And as a married couple, you can recall the times in your lives, especially during the later years of your marriage, where loving them was hard. But you loved, even during those difficult times, because you knew that *through* your love, no matter how challenging, you were God's instrument in showing them *his* love. You loved because you knew a saint was in your midst.

This is the love that we are called to give. A love that reflects the love that Jesus has for them, and for us. It is a love that is sacrificial. A love that places their needs before our own. A love that has only one motivation – to open their ears so that they can hear the Word of God and experience for themselves his unmeasurable love. Every Christian is called to do this – to share the love of Jesus in every situation, in every relationship, at every time. This is how God has chosen to use us. For after all, saints are made, not born.

Often times this seems easy, especially when the worldly love that we have for the person aligns with the love that Jesus has for them. What I mean is, it is easy to share *his* love with those who we love. But Christ calls us to do more than that. He calls us to share his love with every person, from every culture, and from every nation. And it is in this way that love becomes hard, even impossible. For how can we love someone who doesn't think like we do? How can we serve someone who doesn't conform to our way of living? It is at this point where our worldly love must diverge from Jesus' love, where we must abandon our own judgements and opinions of others and lean on him, instead. Where we must love, not because we love them, but because *he* loves them.

3 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

We are called children of God. And God would desire that *all* would be called his children. And so he sends us into the world to love those in the world.

The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

If we are the instruments he uses to bring his Word to the ears of the world, how can we do that if we refuse to speak to the world? How can we do that if we continue to be satisfied with a world that does not know him, if we ignore those we cannot love with our own power? Or even worse than ignoring them, if we bring ourselves into conflict with them? This is not what Jesus did at the cross. Instead, he prayed, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." We must do the same. We must pray for those who have closed their ears to God's word, or who have twisted it until it is unrecognizable. We must pray for them, always, but we must also make connections with them. We must connect with them in a loving way, even if that love is drawn only from the well of Christ's love for us. We must love, even when we can't seem to find a reason to. We must. Otherwise, how will they ever be transformed into saints?

I know what I'm asking you is hard, maybe even impossible on your own for some who you come into contact with. And God knows this is difficult for us, also. He knows that we struggle with loving the seemingly unlovable. And so he offers to us strength and encouragement. And he does so, not through motivational speeches but through his own body and blood. Each week we gather together, with all the saints from every race, every nation, every time, and he comes to us. And he serves us. And he loves us. And he encourages us to recall those times when we have fallen short in his commission. And then he serves us; he serves us himself. And through this gift God bestows on us his forgiveness. And through this gift God strengthens our faith, reminds us that we are his, encourages us to try again, and then sends us out into the world as his instrument to add souls to the body of Christ.

I encourage you this morning to remember the saints who have gone before you, and I encourage you to continue to pour Jesus' love into those who are still with you, but I also implore you to renew your commitment to bring the power of God's word to everyone around you, even those you, on your own, cannot love. For after all, saints are made, they are not born.

Please pray with me.

We thank you for the saints who have gone before us, and for your boundless love that transforms sinners into saints. Help us to remember that we are all made saints through your grace alone.

Give us the strength to love as you love, especially when it's difficult. Open our hearts to those different from us, and help us share your Word with everyone we meet.

Use us as your instruments, Lord, to bring more people into your family. Remind us that your love knows no boundaries of race, nation, or social class.

Forgive us when we fall short, and renew our commitment to serve you. In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.