

The Rev. Kimberly Reinholz
November 3, 2019
Grace and Holy Trinity Church
Luke 6:20-31

When I went to my first Diocesan Convention, it was as the Youth Missioner for the Diocese of Bethlehem. I hadn't been working for the diocese long but had inherited having a youth booth, and the tradition was to have a slideshow with some upbeat contemporary Christian music playing as the soundtrack. I wasn't really into Christian music at the time, everything I had listened to for the decade preceding was definitely not "church safe music." But I found some music that worked, including one song that I probably should have never used. The song was a cover of Amazing Grace performed by the Boston based punk band The Dropkick Murphys. I love this version personally- it has blaring bagpipes, a deep driving bassline, and all the power cords a girl could ask for.

I didn't think through using this in the slide show and had a youth worker ask me where they

could hear more from this group. I advised them that the group wasn't really "Christian" and that it wouldn't necessarily be wise to look up the rest of their library, which includes songs about barroom brawls, piracy, and sexual exploits. But I would gladly send them the link to buy the Amazing Grace single on iTunes.

Imagine my surprise this week when I saw a different side of The Murphys. Who this past summer gave a private concert to "The Mighty Quinn," a 3-year-old Boston native who is fighting brain cancer. This pint-sized barroom hero had been quarantined to his house due to a compromised immune system. The band performed a private concert for him on his front lawn. Named after the Bob Dylan song, Quinn has lived up to his name, and The Dropkick Murphys have even written him his own theme song. He continues to fight - and on Wednesday, October 29, he dropped the puck at the Boston Bruins home game. His most recent MRI shows no signs of new cancer.

Now it's hard to imagine that a bunch of punks from Boston might be saints. I'm not saying that if you start listening to their music,

you will be miraculously healed of cancer. But I am willing to consider them modern prophets and preachers of a sort. I'm not sure how they would categorize themselves as such. Based on their lyrics, they probably consider themselves in the good company of sinners. I would argue that the unlikely beneficiaries of God's justice, mercy, and love: the poor, the hungry, and those who weep, would also include the punks, the outcasts, and the weirdos who find a place in the kingdom of God where their suffering and isolation are eradicated.

It seems to me that based on our theology of adoption into the Body of Christ at Baptism, our membership in the Church, which is dependent upon our baptism, that these Irish Catholic Bostonians were more than likely Christened. I don't have baptismal records to prove it, but I would take that bet. This means that while they are sinners, like all of us, they have been redeemed by the Spirit who reconciles us one to another and to God and God's beloved Creation. This is precisely how a punk can be a prophet. This is how a kid with cancer can be a symbol of the kingdom come.

This is how we live into the understanding that there is no difference between the saints we celebrate today and the sinners we encountered last week in our gospel lessons.

As Christians, we need to put aside our preconceived notions about who is a saint and who is a sinner. The Lutheran Pastor and Preacher The Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber, in her book "Accidental Saints" talks about her companions along the way who helped her discern her call to ordination. She walks with folk who were religious and not spiritual, who were her companions in consolation and desolation and who needed a pastor who spoke their language. As such, Bolz-Weber started a community in Denver CO called A House for All Sinners and Saints. She has since left that parish and handed over the reins to a new pastor, and the congregation continues to grow and change based on the needs of those sinners and saints in attendance.

I feel like I need to clarify that last statement - those sinners and saints- are not two distinct groups of people. They are one congregation, they are one person, they are both

and. Just like here, just like you, just like me. We are sinners and saints all of us. Each of us here who have been baptized, (if you haven't been baptized and would like to be and talk to me after Church today), has become the vessel for saintly and sinful behaviors. Let me talk about the difference between these behaviors for just a second.

Sinful acts are acts which separate you from the love of God, the love of your neighbor, or the love of Creation. Who you are, who you love, who you vote for, how you look, what language you speak, not any one of these attributes intrinsically separates you from God's love. Who you are, who you love, who you vote for, how you look, what language you speak ought not to separate you from the love of your neighbor. Who you are, who you love, who you vote for, how you look, what language you speak should not separate you from the love of Creation. Identity, orientation, politics, body, and culture are not in and of themselves sins. If any of these separate you from God, one another, or Creation, then there is some reconciliation to be done somewhere along the way.

Saintly acts are acts that connect you to God's love, healthy relationships with your neighbors, and the love of Creation. When we acknowledge God and love God and ask for God's intercession on behalf of ourselves or those we love, that is saintly. When we show up with a casserole, or a hug, or a note, that is saintly. When we breathe in the crisp autumn air or give thanks for the rain on another rainy Sunday morning, that is saintly.

Often times we are living in the in-between in normal-Ville just keeping our heads down and doing what needs doing without considering how it relates to God, or to others to Creation. We just are doing the doing. We don't consider the motivations behind why we do what we do and how we do it.

This is actually dangerous to just do for the sake of doing. Being ignorant of our behaviors allows us to run the risk of sin without recognizing it. When we stop noticing the things we do and why we do them we find ourselves in the position of "woe" when we think we have enough we don't need to worry, when we think we are full so we don't have to worry, when we

believe it's all good. We can laugh at the expense of others because we don't have to worry. Then we find ourselves not fulfilling our baptismal promises and falling into sin.

When we fall into sin, we repent and return to the Lord, at least that is what we are supposed to do. It is one of the promises we made in baptism. We are supposed to lead by example. We are supposed to be prayerful and considerate of all that we meet, recognizing Jesus and addressing the injustices of the world. We are supposed to be saints.

In reality, we are sinners and saints. All of us. Not just the Dropkick Murphys, but the Mighty Quinns, and you and you and you and me. All us saints. All us sinners, here together. Heads up beloved, keep your heads up, and count your blessings, because otherwise, we keep our heads down, and we will drown in woe.

So that we don't forget that we are all saints and sinners. I invite you now to take a moment and recall those individuals in your own lives who have made it possible for you to live into your identities, who are your accidental and unconventional saints. Who has been your

companion in consolation and desolation? Who has been your connection to the Divine? Take a moment today to thank God for that person or persons, maybe you can do it while you listen to Amazing Grace by The Dropkick Murphys. That's what I'll be doing this afternoon.

Amen