

For All the Saints

Ephesians 1: 11-23

Luke 6:20-31

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Ephesians 1: 11-23

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Luke 6:20-31

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. "Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. "Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

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In her book, *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*, Elizabeth Gilbert¹ shared the story of a young man who was an aspiring painter and moved to France to surround himself with beauty and inspiration. He became friendly with a group of 'fancy aristocrats,' and he was invited to a party at a castle. He was promised that it would be the most fabulous party of the year. It would be attended by the rich, the famous, and even some crowned heads of Europe. And

best of all, it would be a costume party in which everyone went all out and no one skimmed on their costume.

He was quite excited by the invitation and quickly designed his flamboyant costume as he wanted it to be a showstopper. Excitedly he scoured all of Paris for the best materials for his costume. It was audacious and no details were missed. When he arrived at the castle he changed into his costume in the car and then went up to the front steps. The butler greeted him and found his name on the guest list. He entered the ballroom...and immediately realized his mistake,

True, this was a costume party, he had not been misled by his friends, but he had missed one major detail in translating from French to English. This was a themed costume party, and the theme was 'a medieval court.' In and among the wealthiest and most beautiful people in all of Europe who were dressed in elegant and elaborate period gowns and sparkling heirloom jewels, the aspiring artist was dressed as a lobster.

The young man wore a red leotard, red tights, red ballet slippers, giant red foam claws, and his face was painted red. For an eternal ghastly moment he stood in the entryway to the ballroom wanting to bolt and run in shame, but instead found his resolve. Deciding that he had worked so hard and diligently on the costume and was proud of it, he took a deep breath and walked out onto the dance floor.

He realized later that it was from being an aspiring artist that he could find the courage and freedom to be so vulnerable and absurd. He had done his best, and now it was here for all to see. He dared to trust in his costume, and in the circumstances.

The room was silent. The music, dancing and conversations stopped. A guest asked him what he was. "I am the court lobster," he announced.

This brought a room full of laughter, not laughter at him, but rather the laughter of pure joy. They loved him. They loved his weirdness, his sweetness, his bright, bold, court lobster costume. Before the night was over he even danced with the Queen of Belgium.

Who in your life, who along your faith journey, has been vulnerable, daring, bold, determined, risk-taking and aspiring to be inspiring, for what they believed in, even if it meant feeling as obvious and awkward as a tall, bright red lobster in a room full of wealth and jewels, who risked being laughed at instead of with, who risked being kicked out instead of welcomed in, because of something they believed in?

For this aspiring artist this experience was about acceptance into a different language and culture, a world where he had the talent and wanted to belong, so he stubbornly persisted and carried on. He put himself out there and danced with royalty, but he risked his friendships, his pride, his career, in that single moment when he answered, "I am the court lobster."

Today as we honor our loved ones on All Souls, All Saints. Day, as we think about the lessons of life they taught us, the ways of faith that they opened up for us, we know that they too had vulnerable times of daring to put themselves out there, of having a desire to achieve something with the risk of failure, of rejection, of shame, yet in spite of it, they persevered and succeeded—perhaps not artfully or gracefully—but success that showed us how to dare and dream for what is important to us. Perhaps it was for their career, their family, their passions, their faith, yet whatever it was they dared to go for it come what may. Today we honor the whole cloud of witnesses who lived real lives of faith and of failure, of struggles and success, of doubts and discernment, yet their faith journeys set the path for our faith journeys. Those who came before us lived with their mark of the seal of the Holy Spirit and now in heavenly privilege rest in the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, and with a spirit of wisdom and the eyes of their heart enlightened.

We remember our faith ancestors who strove and prayed for the many ways the poor in daily needs, in spirit, in comfort, in companionship, were blessed. We honor the great cloud of witnesses who worked and ministered for ways the hungry could be nurtured spiritually and to have full bellies. We remember our faith ancestors who endeavored to bring peace and hope to those who wept from grief, from pain, from failure. We honor the great cloud of witnesses who fought relentlessly against the systems of hate and injustice in all its many and ugly forms.

We remember that sometimes they took huge personal and financial risks to act in faith, that they sometimes turned the other cheek so often they were left bruised and sore, that they gave from their hearts for others warmth and comfort, that they offered what they could to those in need as they followed the golden rule and the platinum rule. We remember their lessons, their stories, some which were taught in this sanctuary, or classrooms downstairs, others that were taught in so many other places in our childhoods, our teen years, as well as those that we are still just learning.

The memories, the stories, the ministries of people, we lift in remembrance today came about in different ways. Some were quiet, prayerful approaches, some begin as a suggestion in a committee meeting, some were a bold and passionate response to a news story, some were radically prompted by the question ‘what if,’ and some began with a sacred nudge or push.

Some seemed like fantastic ideas, like a party with friends at a castle in France, and some seemed to be as bizarre as a bright red lobster in a medieval court, yet all tell our story, the story of the body of Christ, the story of spreading the gospel however, wherever and whenever.

Being ordained into Christian ministry, to be one chosen and set apart as clergy was until the early 19th century reserved for men only. By 1853, there were two female clergy in the US- Clarissa Danforth and Antoinette Brown. Their challenges and uphill climbs and denominational denial were part of what is called the ‘stained glass ceiling,’ yet these two faith ancestors set the way and the path so the number of female clergy has skyrocketed, especially in the past two decades. There was a time just over 200 years ago that the idea of a woman leading worship, celebrating communion, officiating at a wedding, baptizing a child, providing spiritual care for the dying and those grieving a loved one, was as absurd and ridiculous as a court lobster. Yet that is an everyday part of our faith.

The range of faith beliefs and practice diversity of the Congregational, Calvinist, Lutheran and Anabaptist traditions, all with varying theologies of Communion and worship and Scripture, still found a way to come together as the United Church of Christ as many of our faith grandparents boldly, creatively, and diligently dared with resolve to heed Christ’s call that ‘they all may be one.’

NH is a small and mostly rural state, one of the very least religious in the country, and we are just about as far from southern Africa as we can be, so yes, let’s form a partnership with the UCC in Zimbabwe, let’s share our faith stories and our prayers, let’s visit one another, let’s worship in mutual ministry. Sounds impossible, sounds absurd, yet we have had the faithful champions, one whom we lift today in remembrance, Jackie Morehouse, that widened the circle of the body of Christ so that nearly 30 years ago this wild, flamboyant idea became a faith-filled reality and blessing.

Who in your life, who along your faith journey, has been daring, bold, determined, risk-taking and aspiring to be inspiring, for what they believed in, for the faith that blesses the underdog, loves our enemies, and is our inheritance through Jesus Christ who gives us the courage and the freedom to live so deeply into our Christian heritage? Amen.

¹ Gilbert, Elizabeth, *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*, Riverhead Books, NYNY, 2015, pages 260-264