

## Special Remembrance

This coming Saturday is All Saints Day. I have done a write-up about this service in the Newsletter, but since only a couple of you have seen my article, I wanted to tell you what I was thinking.

You may have never celebrated All Saints Day before—or even know what its purpose is. In Catholic and liturgical Protestant churches, certain saints are given specific feast days. All Saints' Day is for all the saints—all the “other” saints if you will.

Since most protestant churches don't celebrate or honor the saints in the way the Catholic Church does, I wondered a few years ago, when I was pastor at Smyrna, if we might not do well to start remembering and honoring our own “saints.” Not so much the over-arching/famous saints that we sometimes hear about such as St. Francis or St. Jerome or St. Peter. They made a difference in the church and in the holding up of the Gospel and the spreading of the Good News to the world. Large scale stuff.

I thought, though that every one of us has someone who made a difference for us—holding up the Gospel before you and me with their lives and words. Just like the “real” saints, but on a smaller, more personal scale.

Each of us probably have at least one person and maybe several people who meet that description of “saint.” Maybe they were/are a Sunday School teacher, a friend, a parent, a grand-parent, or maybe even someone who picked us up and took us to church.

There are lots of ways to be a saint to others in this world. On the back of the bulletin, I wrote this: *Be a “Saint” by helping others be the person God created them to be.*

Today, I want to give each of you the opportunity to spend some time during the service to honor and remember those people who were your “saints,” those who taught or shared or maybe simply lived a Christian life before you in a way that it made a difference in your own life.

We all have saints, but we are also called to BE a saint to others in that same way. Christ calls us to encourage and equip people to live a real, honest, and fruitful Christian life.

The main focus of his three years of ministry was to disciple and equip the twelve. Jesus taught them and then entrusted the church and the spreading of the Good News to those same Disciples, commanding that they do the same—win others, teach others, and make disciples.

This is the most important thing we can do—this is what it means to “bear fruit.” As we live a real and authentic Christian lives, those values in our lives which guide our spiritual life and behaviors will influence others

It is important to remember those positive influences from our lives and seek to emulate those “saints” that we remember fondly. One of the greatest things we can do is be a positive influence on another, helping them develop a joyful and lifelong relationship with God through Jesus the Christ.

In just a minute I am going to ask you to come forward and light a candle—and to say the name of the person you are honoring—your saint. If you will, I encourage you to say why you chose that person.

Let me start it off. First of all I want to light a candle for Pam Steele's great grandmother Emma. I had several people on my mind, but the person I finally chose will probably surprised. I light this candle in honor of Vonna. We have been on this ministry journey since we were in our mid-30's and she has been a support and an asset every step of the way. She was also the main breadwinner several times during this journey. Also, she has been and continues to be a minister herself, in every sense of the word. Without Vonna, I wouldn't be here today.

Who else wants to honor a saint in their lives?

### **Deut 6:1-9; 20-24**

Now this is the commandment, the statutes, and the ordinances, which Yahweh your God commanded to teach you, that you might do them in the land where you go over to possess it; 2 that you might fear Yahweh your God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you; you, and your son, and your son's son, all the days of your life; and that your days may be prolonged. 3 Hear therefore, Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with you, and that you may increase mightily, as Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has promised to you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. 4 Hear, Israel: Yahweh is our God. Yahweh is one. 5 You shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. 6 These words, which I command you today, shall be on your heart; 7 and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be for frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the door posts of your house, and on your gates...20 When your son asks you in time to come, saying, "What do the testimonies, the statutes, and the ordinances, which Yahweh our God has commanded you mean?" 21 then you shall tell your son, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; 22 and Yahweh showed great and awesome signs and wonders on Egypt, on Pharaoh, and on all his house, before our eyes; 23 and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore to our fathers. 24 Yahweh commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear Yahweh our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are today.

Lots of times, we hear people talking about "those kids today." Reality is that adults have been talking about that very thing for generations upon generations.

To be honest with you, most of the things we worry about and talk about when it comes to our kids are not that important in the greater scheme of things.

When I was a teenager, it was all about hair—on your head, over your ears, over your collar, and on your face. You know, it was a REALLY big deal to adults but we were just kids being kids, it wasn't really personal, though my dad thought it was.

Still, in the right place (or the WRONG place) having long hair could get you confronted and called names, or even beaten up. The funniest part to me was that they thought it was SO bad

—but all the men in the old photographs on Grandpa's wall looked just like us :)  
What the adults were afraid of was that we would go right off the deep end and never return. I understand that better now that I am a parent twice-over. We want our kids to embrace our values. We want them to be like us—at least the best parts of us.

We have spent part of the service celebrating the saints in our lives—the people who made a difference in our spiritual formation. Remember, though, we have our own responsibility to mentor others—especially our own children and grandchildren.

When the people of Israel were given the law through Moses, God gave them one of those “here's YOUR part of the deal” things. God made several promises, powerful promises, but in the passage we just read, we see that there are some things required of the people. Not only were they to keep the law, they were to teach it to their families—to their offspring.

Maybe you don't have children or grandchildren—or maybe they are not nearby for you to be able to interact with them regularly. Each of us can still be faithful to God by following the pattern God set up—through the mentoring of others. Someone who is spiritually younger and who needs guidance and support.

Look back or think back to verses 1-2. We are to mentor and to teach from a position of personal obedience. It starts with “fear God and keep all the commandments given to you...” Whether we are teaching our kids or whether we are mentoring others, we begin by personally living by the law of God. It starts from the inside out—if we are to teach others, we must first be faithful—to keep the commandments and live our faith. None of that “do as I say, not as I do...” stuff. That never did work. Children and those who are young in faith tend to learn from what they SEE and copy what they are exposed to.

Keep my commandments, God says. Keep them when you come into the promised land. One result of keeping the commandments is that those you teach by example will REALLY believe that you believe.

Keeping the commandments and honoring God also shows that you are a God-fearing person, one who is in awe of the power and wisdom and ability and the absolute awesomeness of God. This is a combination of respect with some fear mingled in. Keep the laws yourself and fear God yourself—THEN, teaching your children to do the same.

SHOW them that you defer to God and defer to him personally. In verse two, there is a promise connected to this passage—that your days will be prolonged. Honestly, I don't know what that means. At the very least, I believe it means that your days will not be artificially shortened.

Verse three also has a promise for the Israelites and I think for us—but not exactly in the same way. God says that if they will honor God and keep his commands and teach their children—that they will be given the increase in a land of milk and honey. That is kind of the code-word for the Promised Land, but that doesn't mean that God won't bless you and me when we are faithful. He will.

Then in verse 4 we read the Shema (which literally means “hear”). This was to be read twice each day, in the morning and in the evening.

Again, this passage was written for Israel, but if we apply these verses to ourselves (and I think we should), the Shema says that God is our God and he is ONE—for me, the best way to translate that term is to say that he is one God, that there IS one God. And that he is THE God.

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart, your soul, and all your might and these words I command you today shall be on your heart...” You know, I am generally a thinker, not a feeler. I tend to function out of facts and observable things—but the heart is important to faith. As a teacher or a mentor or a parent or grandparent, there is no way we can guide others and help them grow until our heart is right—or at least on the way to being right. Until we are growing toward holiness.

The LORD's commands and the LORD's one-ness and all that he is is to be at the forefront of our hearts and minds. When we sit, when we walk, when we lie down, and when we get up.

Now, when it comes to the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> verses, I think Israel made a mistake by taking the commands literally. Now that is a personal opinion and your mileage may vary. They literally tied the commands to their hands and to their foreheads and wrote them on their doorposts. Not that there is anything wrong with that. But it seems that by taking these verses literally and doing what they said literally, the thought they were meeting the requirements—though they forgot to REALLY take them seriously.

Let me go back and read verse 20-24 again, because we find the whole teaching in that proverbial nutshell.

*20 When your son asks you in time to come, saying, “What do the testimonies, the statutes, and the ordinances, which Yahweh our God has commanded you mean?” 21 then you shall tell your son, “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt. Yahweh brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; 22 and Yahweh showed great and awesome signs and wonders on Egypt, on Pharaoh, and on all his house, before our eyes; 23 and he brought us out from there, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he swore to our fathers. 24 Yahweh commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear Yahweh our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as we are today.*

According to these passages, you and I are to live our lives in such a way that those in our families and those we are mentoring (both on purpose and simply by living our lives) will feel the need to know how we get our strength and why we are so different from those around us.

Let me say some of that again. According to what I just read, you and I are to live our lives so that those around us will want to know—will literally ask—how we get our strength and how we manage to live righteously in a fallen world. And then we are to share our faith and our love for God—that God makes that difference

Verse 24 says we are to fear God for our good and that rings true in every way. Spiritually, mentally, emotionally, physically. People of strong faith live longer and healthier lives.

We ARE to help others become the persons that God intended them to be. It is part of these commands. It is part of Jesus' own ministry—the one that he passed to you and to me.

We are go “go ye therefore” and bear fruit and what we've just read about is one of the ways—and I would say one of the most important ways—that we can bear fruit that lasts.

Better that evangelism. Better than preaching. Living our lives in God's will and helping others want to do the same. Making them to want what we have—the strength, the comfort, the power, the love, and the attitude.