



## SUNDAY SERMON

# How to be a Saint

---

Let's begin with the premise that each of us is created by God with unique gifts, that an essential part of our life's work is to discern those gifts and use them – for our own fulfillment as children of God and, perchance, as a blessing to the world around us. This is the first in a series of three sermons in which I'll speak about how we're called to use our gifts as the people of God. Let's shoot for the stars: this sermon is on "how to be a saint."

In his autobiographical work, *The Seven Story Mountain*, the great Trappist mystic, Thomas Merton tells of the day he was walking with his friend Lax who asked him out of the blue,

*"What do you want to be, anyway?"*

*"I don't know; I guess what I want is to be a good Catholic."*

*"What do you mean, you want to be a good Catholic?"*

*The explanation I gave was lame enough, expressed my confusion, and betrayed how little I had really thought about it at all. Lax did not accept it.*

*"What you should say" – he told me – "what you should say is that you want to be a saint."*

*A saint! The thought struck me as a little weird. I said:*

*"How do you expect me to become a saint?"*

*"By wanting to," said Lax simply.*

*"I can't be a saint," I said, "I can't be a saint." And my mind darkened with a confusion of realities and unrealities: the knowledge of my own sins, and the false humility which makes [people] say that they cannot do the things that they must do, cannot reach the level that they must reach: the cowardice that says: "I am satisfied to save my soul, to keep out of mortal sin," but which means, by those words: "I do not want to give up my sins and my attachments."*

And you ... "what you should say is that you want to be a saint." But beyond wanting, Merton doesn't say how you get to be a saint, so I'm going to tell you. It begins like this:

First, you take a good hard, honest look at the world as it is. You can see how things are in your community, at home, in this nation; the world as it is.

Next, you think about the world as it ought to be. You can picture how the world could look, should look, would look if it were filled with love, justice, and mercy. We've each got some ideas – a vision from the Bible, from our childhood dreams, or the yearnings of our hearts.

Then you take these two images – the world as it is and the world as it ought to be – and you pay attention to the gap in between. Just that: pay attention. Mind the gap – as they say in the London Tube.

*Continued*

### DATE

All Saints' Day  
Sunday, Nov. 4, 2018

### PREACHER

The Rev. Ledlie Laughlin

Each morning when you get up, you pray, "help me God to see what's going on in the world around us – as it is. And, help me God to see the possibilities for your love, the cries for your justice." That's really what we're saying in the Lord's Prayer. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. God, help me see, and be a part of that.

Then as you go about your day, you do whatever little thing you can to make "the world as it is" more like "the world as it ought to be" – in the different places where you spend your day, and in some of the things you do – in your kitchen, when you step out the front door, in your neighborhood ... And you do just that, every day – at school, at home, at work, in the supermarket, in your decisions and actions – something to make the world more like it ought to be.

And do that for a lifetime. That's how you become a saint.

This is an old family recipe passed on through history ... from the prophets in every generation: seeing and naming "the world as it is" often meant – and means – naming truths about the world that make some of us uncomfortable, that we do not want to see or acknowledge – about the balances of relationship, the distribution of resources, access to power; about who determines the public discourse, or acts as guardians of the sacred. Not only naming corruption and errancy "out there," but acknowledging our own complicity in the systems that diminish the radiance of God in the face of others, maybe in the face of those whom we deeply love.

Then setting forth a vision that comes, ultimately, from God. Said Martin, "I have a dream." Said Jesus, 'I have come to give sight to the blind, to let the prisoners go free, to heal the sick and bind up the wounded.' Said Isaiah long ago, in our text this morning, 'I will make a feast for the people and wipe away every tear.' Isaiah first spoke these words when Israel was being exploited and oppressed by invading forces. In subsequent generations, Isaiah's words have been read at funerals – Jewish and Christian; they've been a beacon of hope to those imprisoned, impoverished, in homeless shelters, and to refugees. Isaiah says, "I shall gather the people on my holy mountain, and wipe away every tear."

As it is. As it ought to be. Mind the gap.

Well-known saints apply this recipe in the public arena. Lesser known saints – those known to you, me, or to God alone – have exercised this same ministry in quieter ways – doing what we can do. I don't need to give you more specifics; God has planted a dream within you and given you all that you need for the task ahead. You already have the making of a saint.

Regardless our political leanings, for a lot of us "the world as it is" appears right now to need some serious loving. The vitriol, anger, violence and closed-mindedness currently dominating our civic discourse is troubling in many ways. I think part of the hurt comes because we believe that we are better than this, as individuals and as a nation – that our capacity to dismiss and despise one another is a betrayal of who we believe we are as beloved of God.

I trust if you're eighteen or older, you're going to vote on Tuesday. And you're going to hope your one little vital vote is going to help make the world a bit more as it ought to be. Your preferred candidates and your preference on positions may carry the day, and may not. Either way, the very next day you will be presented with a choice – countless choices really – to mind the gap, to take what step you can. Whatever the outcome of the election, the world as it is will still be fractured with division. So remember the vision: that in God we are all one body; we are all beloved; envision the world as it ought to be. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

As we see in Jesus' raising of Lazarus, it is Christ who has the power of resurrection, to bring new life out of death, joy out of tears. And then Christ says to those standing by: "Unbind him. Unbind him, and let him go." Jesus calls upon others to assist, calls upon the community to participate. We have a role to play: to help those who seek new life, to roll away the stones, remove the strips and cloths that blind and bind one another. Lord knows, sometimes I feel ready to step out in the light of a new dawn, but find myself still wrapped and trapped – in fear, grief, hobbled by sin, awaiting forgiveness. Unbind somebody. Where you find someone in bondage, your friend, your spouse, your partner, the stranger; where you find someone struggling to be free, unbind them and let them go.

You do this for a lifetime, and then?

Madeleine L'Engle tells a story, "What Saints Do In Heaven:"

A good man dies, goes to heaven, and is welcomed at the pearly gates, which are thrown open for him to enter. He goes through them in a daze of bliss, because it is everything he has been taught, golden streets, milk and alabaster and honey and golden harps. He wanders the streets lost in happiness, until after a while he realizes that he is all alone; he hasn't seen anybody at all. He walks and walks, and he sees nobody. So he goes back to the gates, and he asks, "Peter?"

"Yes, my son?"

"This really is heaven?"

"Oh, yes, my son. Don't you like it?"

"Oh, it's just wonderful! But where is everybody? Where are the prophets? Where is the Holy Family? Where are the saints?"

Peter looks at him kindly. "Oh, them? They're all down in hell, ministering with the damned. If you'd like to join them, I'll show you the way."

Mind the Gap.