

All Saints/Baptism Sunday A
Peace, Seattle
November 5, 2017
1 John 3:1-13, Matt 5:1-12

LIVING SAINTS

This All Saints Sunday is all about LEGACY, we celebrate the faithful witness of all those people throughout the history of the church, who have given themselves to living out the Gospel in their specific times and places.

But our celebration of this faithful witness goes beyond the names on the “OFFICIAL ROSTER.”

It includes the names of ordinary folk who were captured by grace and caught up in God’s unfolding story. It includes people in our lives whose faith, though not perfect, has seeded and nurtured, mentored and touched our own.

While we’re lifting up the names of five Peace saints who’ve joined the Church Triumphant in the past year, we’re also adding THREE LIVING SAINTS to the list of those who have been called and claimed by Christ in the waters of baptism.

Three boys—and listen to their names:

- **Milo Everette Montana Steere,**
- **Lawrence Carew Peterson and Harmon Victor Peterson—don’t you love these names?**

WHO we are connects back to WHOSE we are, and each of these boys has what we might call LEGACY NAMES...names with a history.

Sarah and Nigel, Milo’s parents, tell me his name was suggested by a friend, and that they first liked it for its simplicity, for the way it was easy to say and spell and pronounce, while still being somewhat unique.

But as Milo’s personality has emerged, his name has added deeper layers. The root meanings of Milo’s name—mild, peaceful, calm, merciful—describe to a “T” the kind of person Milo is showing himself to be.

Milo’s **first middle** name, **Everette**, honors Sarah’s grandfather on her mother’s side, and his **second middle** name, **Montana**, belongs to Nigel’s father—who’s shortened it to Monte.

But wait—there’s more! Turns out Milo’s great-grandmother’s name was **Dawn Roper**. So when she married great-grandpa Bruce she “**Roped a Steere**.” Well, after that, **Monte’s uncle** figured **all Steere boys** should be named after the famous Longhorn steer states.

He’d already given Monte’s older brother the nickname of “**Tex**” after the Texas Longhorn steer. So the next logical name was **Montana Steere**, which became Monte. **How’s that for legacy?!**

Now Montana happens to be my birth state, so I feel a personal connection there.

Who we are connects back to WHOSE we are (and sometimes) WHERE we come from. **Leah and Dan** tell me that the names of their twin boys—**Lawrence Carew & Harmon Victor**—go back to their courting days in Minnesota. They met while playing softball and their 2nd date involved going to a Minnesota Twins game.

When they found out they were going to have twin boys, they knew their names had to be associated in some way with the Minnesota Twins. They also knew there were family names they wanted to use, so they decided that each boy would have a family name and a Twins name.

The name Lawrence comes from Dan's father's side of the family, while **Victor** shows up a number of times both on Dan's side and on Leah's side.

When it came to the Minnesota Twins connection, Leah and Dan wanted to use the names of players who not only stood out on the field but were also upstanding human beings.

Rod Carew and Harmon Killebrew were the two men they chose.

(Not that you need me to, Dan and Leah, but...) **I applaud your choice!**

You see, when I was a Milo's age, living in southern Minnesota, my brother and I would don our Twins jackets and caps and make the 90-mile trip with our Dad up to old Metropolitan Stadium, picking up grandpa Tiny along the way.

We'd sit on the wooden bleachers along the third base line and watch Rod Carew steal bases and Harmon Killebrew swat home runs.

You see, with a little effort—and sometimes no effort at all—we can find things that connect us. Shared names, shared history, shared story.

When the Triune God meets these three boys in the water of this font, their story and their family both expand exponentially as they're grafted into the body of Christ, and become kin to one another and kin to us. They get a new name and legacy to add to the ones they've already got—BELOVED SON OF GOD.

For over 2000 years every saint and sinner—(and we're both aren't we?)—who wades in these waters is united with Christ and his body, the church, and becomes a living member and a conduit of grace and love, of justice and mercy in the world.

Oh, it doesn't always work as smoothly as that, our human propensity to become curved in on ourselves often gets in the way. The conduit of grace and love get plugged up. Justice and mercy don't flow like they're supposed to. We forget who we belong to.

And that's why forgiveness and community are so critical: we need a fresh start every day; we need people alongside us who can summon our better angels. But even if we can't always count on that, we can always count on this one thing: when we're touched by these waters our identity as children of God becomes indelible. It can never be wiped away.

SEE WHAT LOVE THE FATHER HAS GIVEN US, THAT WE SHOULD BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD, AND THAT IS WHAT WE ARE!

God's love for us has no expiration date. It's good come hell or highwater. Whatever circumstances life may throw our way, nothing—not even death itself—can separate us from that love.

I'm officiating at four funerals this month. Each of those services will begin with these words of promise from Paul's letter to the Romans:

"When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death.

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death,
so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life.
For if we have been united with him in a death like his,
we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

This sacrament, this sign, you see, matters!

It'll follow these boys—as it follows us—wherever life takes us, however long it takes us!

Luther, in his Small Catechism asks: HOW CAN WATER DO SUCH GREAT THINGS?

His answer: Clearly the water doesn't do it, but the word of God which is with and alongside the water, and faith, which trusts this word of God in the water. For without the word of God the water is plain water, but with the word of God it is a grace-filled water, a bath of new birth in the Holy Spirit.

We need that grace-filled water. Need to wade in it, to live in it.

Early Church Father Tertullian put it this way:

“We little fishes are born in water, nor have we safety in any other way than by permanently abiding in water.”

WHO we are connects back to WHOSE we are, and the intersection of all of that, our identity, our purpose, our future, is right here in the font—a seamless connection with God's people, and creation, across time and space.

We're baptized once, but baptism is really a lifelong sacrament, for the God who meets us here, Father Son, and Holy Spirit, journeys with us our whole life through.

We need sustenance for that journey, and wouldn't you know it—God provides that too!

Christ's very self in bread and wine, given as food to keep us connected to him and to each other.

It's all here, and it's all good. So come...come to the water boys. And you all—come to the Table. Be washed, be nourished, be fed.

Amen.