

From the Pulpit

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“Imagine More...Love”

Revelation 7:9-17; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

November 2, 2014

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Senior Minister

A Communion Meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, Sr. Minister, The First Congregational UCC, November 2, 2014, All Saints Day observed, Pentecost 21, Proper 26, dedicated to the memory of Donald Calhoun, Samuel Gordon, Robert Hadley, Ben Lightbourne, David Loy, Wanda Ray, Marjorie Smith, and Marie Pfeiffer and all

our loved ones who have passed away to eternal life and always to the glory of God!

“Imagine More...Love”

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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“Who is a saint in everyday life?”

In the new film “St. Vincent,” that is the assignment Father Geraghty gives his sixth grade class at St. Patrick’s Elementary School, in the Sheepshead Bay Section of Brooklyn, NY. Through research, pictures, and presentations, the class is supposed to present to the whole school and all their parents models of a saint. It’s a tough assignment. But, when Oliver Bronstein (who thinks he’s Jewish... just not sure) comes up with Vincent McKenna as his “every day saint,” it is clearly a stretch in every imaginable way.

Vincent is Oliver’s next-door-neighbor. He has become Oliver’s “after school babysitter” because Oliver’s mother, Maggie, is working late as a radiologist tech every night. Vincent is a cantankerous, chain-smoking, drunken, gambling war veteran retiree, whose

ideas of after-school activities involve teaching the boy to fight, cursing freely, betting at racetracks, going to the local pub and strip clubs and a relationship with a pregnant Russian “lady of the night.” Vincent also masquerades as a doctor at a nursing home (where he visits his wife stricken by the onset of Alzheimer’s disease).

Oliver says that if the patron saint of adopted children, St. William of Rochester can be accepted in the canonized few, he feels St. Vincent of Sheepshead Bay is also worthy. (As an aside – nowhere in the Vatican is there any record of St. William’s actual canonization in 1256 by Pope Alexander IV).

Once Oliver makes his case for canonizing St. Vincent as an everyday saint, you have to agree that 1) it is a stretch and 2) he does actually meet criteria for self-sacrifice, goodness of heart (at very deep and mostly unrevealed level), and love (especially for his wife of 40 years who has spent the last 8 in the nursing home).

The key to sainthood in this film is one line that Vincent continues to repeat. On several occasions, when Vincent’s actions have made him particularly worthy of being judged, he says to Maggie and Oliver, “*you don’t even know who I am.*” “*You don’t even know who I am...*” It turns out that simple statement triggers Oliver’s research and sense of discovery to unveil who the real Vincent is. (I will save that revelation for you in case you see the film “St. Vincent”).

“You don’t even know who I am...” As I look at Donald Calhoun, Samuel Gordon, Robert Hadley, Ben Lightbourne, David Loy, Wanda Ray, Marjorie Smith, and now Marie Pfeiffer, I wonder how this statement applies to each of them. And for that matter, how does it apply to each of us?

It is clear – especially to those who knew and loved them - each of them had flaws. Since each was human, none was perfect. Each had hiccups on their road to eternity. But, we are reminded in a prayer from Reform Judaism to remember the goodness of each man and woman. We are called to carry their goodness forward in this life. It will be a blessing to them and to us.

More important, each one was very special. They carried in their bodies and souls, stories of life and death; laughter and love; war and peace; deep losses of beloved ones in their lives and struggles against racism and prejudice. Each had gifts God gave them – some of which we knew and others of which we knew nothing or very little. It was my humble honor to preside at all but Robert’s service of thanksgiving and memory. Words which their families and beloved friends shared made it clear to me - all of them were saints of God in everyday life. Now they are saints in glory.

I can also tell you – each imagined more: more health, more resources to share with others, more things to build, more laughter, more music, more books to read, more travels and new discoveries, more ball games, more

time to share with family and friends – more life itself. More Love, always more love.

Today, we lift up the memory of Don, Sam, Marg, Ben, Bob, Dave, Wanda, and Marie and all our beloved ones who have passed to eternal life. Today, we are surrounded by the memory and hope of the everyday saints in our lives. As we remember them with great love, we are also being called to imagine more...

So, how about it? How about you?

This All Saints Day, as you imagine more for First Church, will you join me and step up in your giving at First Church for 2015? Will you join me in imagining more? We have been called to reach high as a community of faith in 2015. We have been called to be as generous as we are grateful.

I was reflecting on the “ask” of this year’s committee. It is 20% more in giving for each one of our households of faith. It is a bold ask – on the surface – but is it really? When we go out to eat, we are more than happy to give 20% on top of our bill for the waiters and waitresses who serve us. The Stewardship Committee – in the same spirit – is asking each of us - as we feast at the table of God’s love in Christ Jesus, to say “Thank you” in supporting the mission and ministry of our church – a ministry in which we have covenanted to walk together in God’s love, justice and mercy.

How about it? On this All Saints Sunday, will you join me and imagine more? Will you join me and turn

your imagination into reality by giving more? Will you join me in turning our gratitude into generosity? In the spirit of remembering our loved ones who have given and given and given to us and then given even more – and all whom we love, let us imagine more by giving more, too. In the spirit of Jesus, who celebrates the blessedness of every life lived in God, let us imagine more love. Thanks be to God. Amen.