

Sermon for All Saints Sunday  
November 5, 2006  
St. Mary of the Hills, Blowing Rock  
The Rev. Jeanne Finan

### **For all the saints**

Does this look familiar (hold up a paper chain)?  
You may have made one of these paper chains as a young child?  
You may be young enough that you made one just last week!  
I still love to make these—  
    to take simple strips of colorful paper,  
        curl each piece into a circle  
            and then connect one circle to the next circle to the next circle  
                to the next circle...  
            well, I think you get the idea.

I thought about paper chains  
    when I began to think about this Sunday celebration  
    of the Feast of All Saints--  
the saints that have gone before us, the saints who are part of our lives right now,  
    the saints who are yet to come.  
All connected—past, present and future—  
    and our own little colorful circle is somewhere in that chain as well.

In the Church we call this on-going connection the communion of saints  
    and we are all part of this communion.

And what a communion it is!  
Today (at the 10:10 service) we will baptize Riley Sauder into this communion of saints.  
Today at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC  
    Katherine Jefferts Schori is being seated as our 26<sup>th</sup> Presiding Bishop.  
    Her investiture was yesterday.  
A baby boy.  
You. Me.  
Our first woman Presiding Bishop.  
What a communion of saints it is

The investiture service bulletin of our new Presiding Bishop opened with these words:

*Today we sing a new song to God: the melody of a renewed communion, the tune of our faith, with its vibrant heritage and radiant future.... We come... as longtime church members and newcomers to the faith. As we gather, we bring our diverse gifts: gifts of music, dance, prophecy, teaching, preaching, and friendship. We present these gifts in the form of our most precious offering to God, our very selves, that all that we do may be for God's glory in the unity of Christ's church.*

In our collect this morning we hear *Almighty God, you have knit us together...*  
Even though I barely qualify as a knitter,

I love this image of being knit together by God.

Because knitting is not particularly linear—

you loop and go under or over or under AND over.

You drop stitches, you pick up stitches.

You can knit in all kinds of shapes, all colors,  
smooth yarn, bumpy yarn, wool, cotton—

You can buy yarn from almost every country in the world--

You can buy yarn even Wal-mart!

God does not discard or discount anyone in this great knitting together adventure.

God knits us together in all our diversity, our differences, our quiriness—  
and somehow, in all its mystery and surprising majesty, it works.

We are one little stitch surrounded by this great garment of lots of other stitches.

Knit one, purl two,

and somehow the communion of saints all holds together.

Now, if we can just remember

how important it is

to hold on to one another

and to celebrate the entire body of Christ.

A few weeks ago, Frank Griswold,

who until November 1<sup>st</sup> served as our Presiding Bishop,

took then Presiding Bishop-Elect, Katherine Jefferts Schori,

to England to meet Archbishop Rowan Williams.

It was, from all reports, a positive and gracious exchange.

As Griswold shared a few days after the event,

in his sermon at St. John's Anglican Church in Notting Hill, London,

these three leaders of the Church talked about their mutual concerns and hopes

for the future of our Anglican communion

and especially its ministry in service to our broken and needy world.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, all three of these leaders in our Church

are aware of the disparity between an Anglican Communion

that has committed itself theologically to gender equity

in all of its representative and consultative bodies,

and yet, there are those in this same communion

who have said they will not sit at the same table

with Katherine Jefferts Schori.

Why?

Because she is a woman.

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<sup>1</sup> Episcopal News Service, October 29, 2006, *Presiding Bishop Preaches in London*

Created in the image of God as a woman.  
And still, there are those who will not break bread with her.

Griswold made an interesting statement. He said:

*I do hope that once they meet her as a person, rather than as a fabrication of the internet, they will be able to sense the depth and authenticity of her faith and to recognize her as a sister in Christ-- and as a Bishop.*

Once they meet her as a person.  
It is so easy to be critical of others when they stubbornly (and in our eyes, foolishly)  
dig in their heels, draw their lines in the sand.

But whom might we need to meet as a person?  
Who is it that we must learn to see as a vital blessing to the communion of saints?

Maybe it is time to stop playing the power games that infect and afflict nations  
and the Church and our own lives,  
those games  
of who is in and who is out,  
who is at the top of and who is at the bottom,  
who is right and who is wrong.

For God says, Who cares!!!???

Who are the people that God blesses?  
The poor in spirit  
Those who mourn  
Those who are meek  
Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness  
Those who are merciful  
Those who are peacemakers  
Those who are persecuted

In our Creation season reading from the *Carmina Gadelica*,  
a collection of Celtic prayers collected by folklorist Alexander Carmichael,  
we also hear about blessing;  
and what we hear is that we are **all** blessed by God.  
No one, no creature, no thing—nothing-- escapes.

*There is no form in the strand  
But is full of God's blessing.*

*There is no life in the sea  
No creature in the river*

*There is no bird on the wing  
No star in the sky.  
There is nothing beneath the sun...*

Remember, today is the feast day of ALL Saints.  
All.  
All are full of God's blessing.

In your service bulletin there are two strips of paper.  
On one,

take a moment and write the name of someone in your life, past or present,  
extraordinary or extra-ordinary,  
someone who has walked your faith journey with you...  
someone who is there to hold your hand this very day.  
someone who has inspired you...  
someone who gives you strength and courage,  
someone who makes you laugh.  
Someone who truly loves you and never misses an occasion to let you know.

And on the other slip of paper,  
Write the name of another kind of saint:

Someone who drives you crazy.  
Someone who irritates you like a small, sharp stone in your shoe.  
Someone who knows just how to push your buttons that tip you over the brink.  
Someone that makes you almost gasp imagining them  
as one of God's saints.  
Someone you think is so, so wrong,  
so, so misled.

And after the service, find the paper chain  
and add both your saints to that chain.  
Go home and fill your house with paper chains of all the saints, past and present.  
And notice how they are all knit together into the glory of God.

As our 26<sup>th</sup> Presiding Bishop said in her homily at National Cathedral yesterday:

*We all ache for a community that will take us in, with all our warts and quirks and petty meanesses—and will still celebrate when they see us coming.*

We are called by God to be that community for one another,  
for all the saints.  
**All** the saints.