

## All Saints 2011

Last Sunday, we hosted the bishop for dinner.

It was the first time I had quality sit-down-and-talk time.

I've had many encounters with him: synod assembly, synod council, dean's meetings, visioning team.

Lots of church business stuff, but no "this is who I am as a person."

The stories flowed.

One story was our family trip to Disney World many years ago.

Our youngest was 7 years old, something like that.

It was a hot summer day in central Florida and he was kind of restless.

Epcot will never be a highlight for the young children.

We paused to rest.

Right beside us was one of those water fountains where water shoots up from the ground.

So our child stripped down to his skivvies and began playing in the water.

He got himself soaking wet, and loved every minute of it.

He had such a good time; he enjoyed it so much.

I wasn't sure that was allowed.

I saw one of the park characters come up.

Ohhh, now we're in trouble.

I assumed we would be kicked out of the park.

It was Goofy.

Rather than condemning us for our breach of social etiquette, Goofy got right in the water and began playing with Isaac.

Soon other kids stripped down to their underwear and joined in the frolicking.

It was a glorious moment, a wondrous moment. It was the highlight of the week.

And we told that story to the bishop last Sunday.

I had forgotten.

You have highlight stories, too. A few dozen of them.

And you tell those stories over and over again because they were that meaningful for you. They are stories about the joy of life.

I learned last year that The Disney Corporation has a name for those times.

They call them "magical moments."

Every Disney Cast Member is expected to create at least one Magical Moment for a Guest in every shift that they work.

Examples are:

- choosing a family to be the grand marshall for the daily parade
- housekeeping decorates a room with special Disney decorations when cleaning the room while the family is at the park for the day
- choosing someone in the crowd to be a character in one of the "street plays" that are performed.

Magical Moments are built into the culture of Disney, and that's what Goofy did for us.

In the church, we call those moments of grace:

- where God's goodness shines through
- where you experience the blessing of being alive
- where you see what is good and right in the world
- where you know firsthand the joy and delight of God's good creation.

Grace notes happen when God peaks through to you.

Have you had any grace notes this week?

Have there been any magical moments in your life this week?

On Monday, I stopped at the veterinary clinic to pick up some medications for my dog.

As I sat down and waited, this cat came over to me.

It did not walk gracefully.

It had this stump for a foot.

It hobbled over to me, and sat on the chair next to me, and leaned into me.

I could see that it had an injury to its face.

Its coat was shaggy and unkept.

I began petting it.

It began purring with the depth and loudness of an 18-wheeler:hmmmmmmm.

I got up for a moment to check on something at the desk.

It cried for me. Meow. Meow.

I sat back down. Hmmmmmmm.

I was so honored. I was so blessed.

This cat was teaching me about the goodness of life, the joy of friendship, the meaningfulness of being alive.

I had forgotten. I was busy with errands.

But this cat reminded me, a genuine spokesperson for God.

It was a grace note to me, and I didn't want to leave.

We had some interesting guests Monday night.  
Witches, goblins, and bunny rabbits knocked on our door asking for candy.  
Most of them were smiling. Most of them said thank you.  
Maybe you were visited by the parrot kid.  
His beak was a foot long.  
He wasn't used to it, and it bumped into the glass of the storm door.  
Or maybe you met the three little witches.  
And you had just enough of the rubber toys with the witch's hat on them to give one to each.  
And you could hear them in the driveway as they walked away:  
"Did you see what I got? I got one, too!"  
Children: their smiles, their creativity, their playfulness; their fragility;  
genuine grace notes from God.

Or perhaps you have met Taylor Baldry.  
I read about him in the Minneapolis paper on Thursday.  
Along the walkway around Lake Calhoun, he sets up a card table and chairs.  
He puts a sign out: The Conversationalist.  
He sets up an easel naming a variety of topics for conversation.  
People who are complete strangers stop and sit and talk with Taylor.  
He said he was tired of communicating with people through texts and emails.  
Nothing beats talking with people directly, face-to-face, with eye contact, even complete strangers.  
What a blessing to talk with a real person on things that matter.  
I'm convinced that God speaks through to people through Taylor the Conversationalist.

You are here in worship today because God spoke to you through other people.  
We call those people saints.  
Saints are people called by God through whom God's grace, goodness, spirit are made known.  
You have had saints in the past.  
And God is working in your life right now through the saints around you.  
Can you see them?  
Saint Goofy. Saint kitty cat. Saint three witches. Saint parrot kid. Saint Taylor the Conversationalist.  
Those have been some of the many saints I have seen this week.

I need to tell you this also: You are a saint. It's the truth.  
 God has chosen you, set you apart, named and claimed you in Baptism, sent you out in service and witness.  
 And, Yes, I know you know that...

... at least in theory.  
 You know it up here, but not always down here.  
 It is easy to forget.  
 Life, for most of us, is just so crazy busy.  
 It's really hard to remember that God has loved you and claimed you and sent you forth on a mission.  
 That's why we have Scripture.  
 To remind us about who we are in the eyes of God, and who God is in our eyes.  
 That's why Moses told ancient Israel that God was writing these words on their hearts, so that they could remember.

And it's more than that life's busy.  
 It's also that most of us, day in and day out, don't feel like beloved children.  
 Too often, we speak and act in ways that aren't loving, that don't reflect God's love, ways that are self-centered and small-minded and myopic in vision.  
 And yet God loves us anyway, and send us out once more.

That's the heart of the Gospel.  
 In First John, we read: *See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is who we are!* (1 Jn. 3:1a).  
 More than that, God doesn't love the person we might be, the person we've promised to be, or the person we're trying to be.  
 God loves *us* -- the real us: warts, scars, and all.  
 No matter what you may have done, or had done to you, you are a child of God.  
 No matter where you have been or where you may go, God will be with you.  
 No matter what you may have said, or what has been said to you, yet God will keep you in God's heart now and forever.

Truth be told, we have no idea what God might do with us or through us.  
 We only know that, in the end, God's kingdom will reign and we will be a part of it, because Christ has made it so.  
 That means, of course, that God is not done with us.

God has something in store for us.

Big or little, hard or easy, God is at work to love the world through the unique person God has created you to be.

Maybe you are called to care for a remarkably challenged -- and challenging -- child.

Maybe you are called to teach kids no one else wants to teach.

Maybe your job is to wait and watch with those who have no one else to wait and watch alongside them.

Or maybe you've been called to be a friend to someone who most people find it difficult to befriend.

Whatever it may be, God will take our characteristics and experiences, our strengths and limitations, our accomplishments and regrets, and somehow use all of them for the common good.

That's what it means to be a *saint* -- to recognize that God has called you by name, chosen you before the founding of the world, and promised to do great things through us for the sake of all the other saints God loves so much.

We might seem like unlikely characters for God to choose and use.

But if you are a little bit familiar with the biblical story, that's pretty typical of God.

On this All Saints Day, we remind ourselves just how much God loves us.

This is why we can face the loss of our loved ones we remember on this day.

We know that God has loved and still loves each one of them.

And God has brought them over from this life through the gateway of death to new and abundant life with God and all the saints triumphant.

And this is why we can go out into this week and world and face the challenges set before us.

Because we know that God accompanies us into this week and world.

And God promises to use us to accomplish God's will and by our very presence to sanctify this world God loves so much.

You are a child of God -- beloved, blessed, cherished, one of a kind, and God is doing great things through you.

That's the truth -- don't you forget it!

Blessings to you, my saints.