

I come from a long line of savers-of-things on my Mother's side of the family. They saved everything, and over the last decade it's fallen to me to go through it all. As I was thinking about what makes items keepers, or items that should be sold, or things that we donate or pass on to someone else, the deciding factor for me is the story behind the item. It's not their monetary value, rather it's the way an item can make a person's life story come alive and allow me to remain in relationship with them even after they have departed this life.

The most important thing I remember about family members, though, beyond the things they left behind, is the strong attachment that remained between them and family who had passed before. Stories of their lives have been handed down through the generations. To this day, I still feel strong, strong connections to family I never met because of way the stories were told, of people who we see no longer yet who are alive in Christ.

Today is All Saints' Day, a major feast in the church. Just as I have saints in my family, I know you have saints in your family. Not perfect, not pure, some are certainly quirky, some may not have been too nice, and some may have even caused us great pain, but human beings who lived among us and made us who we are today – our life stories are linked to theirs.

The Feast of All Saints' is a time in the Church when we remember those in our heritage who have gone before us - throughout history, in our own lives and in the life of this parish. In our silent procession, we named some of the saints that we are connected to through this parish. The people who have shaped our lives recently.

The saints are both with a capital S like Clare of Assisi, and a small s, like those in our families who have not been recognized formally by the church but still may have had a profound affect on our lives and the life of the world. All Saints' is so important in the church that it is just one of four feast days that are recommended in the Book of Common Prayer to include baptisms. This pairing of baptism and the commemoration of the departed speaks to the kind of community that we are called to be as Christians, and that is to be a community of determined hope.

It may be difficult to live with hope. Yet that is our calling. It is through an ancient autumn trilogy of three services: All Hallow's Eve (which we now call Halloween), All Saints and All Souls that we are reminded of the hope by which we are called to live.

Our ancestors used the power of ridicule and humor in the festival of All Hallow's Eve to disarm the power of death. With carnivals and costumes, death was derided and made fun of because we proclaim that Christ overcame the finality of death. All Saints' Day celebrations proclaimed the lives of those who have gone before us, that great cloud of witnesses that the author of Hebrews so eloquently describes: *we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, (so) let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.* The third in the autumn trilogy was All Souls' Day. Festivities proclaimed that while we live with the pain of death in this life, a pain that no one escapes, death does not have the final word. Death derided; the dearly departed lauded; and continued life in Christ beyond death

celebrated. The foundation of our hope praised in this trilogy.

Through the witness of the faithful, we are assured that the pain and loss caused by death and by living in this world is not life lived without God. Their witness assures us over and over that God loves us and is present with us in every situation, and that's what we celebrate today.

We are a people of hope. How, though, in this age of cynicism and blatant evil do we dare to proclaim hope, and what does that hope look like, when we are encouraged by just about everyone else in the world to be hopeless? It can seem a naïve and powerless position.

How do we hope?

We tell our stories, because our stories have power. Every Sunday we start with the story of our faith as told through the biblical witness. Every Sunday we pray the Eucharistic prayer. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

We tell the stories of our many ancestors in the faith – Abraham and the Israelite people, the disciples and followers of Jesus -, who, like us, may have lived very imperfect lives, but who open up their lives to the movement of the Holy Spirit and who show us the power of God. We listen to and tell the stories of the people in our own lives who have reflected God's power and presence in the world. We all have our own saints - in our families and outside of our families - whose stories have guided and shaped our lives. Stories tell us truths, about who we have been, who we are today, and who we hope to be going forward.

There's more. We are never alone. We are surrounded by the saints, particularly the people we have loved so dearly in our lives. One of my treasured memories is of a cousin of my mother's talking about making every day decisions. The saints in her life – her mother, her father, her sister, aunts and uncles – surrounded her constantly. The language she used was “we” language. WE have decided to do... we are going to make this change... we, we, we. She lived alone, but she was never alone. The people who formed her, guided her throughout her life, were still with her into her 90's. She had no way to say “I” because they were ever-present. That's what it really means, this celebration of the saints. Through the Eucharist, we sit at the table together always. The people we love in this room, and all of the people who have died before us. It's a big family meal and we're all there. No amount of pain, or suffering, or confusion, or disheartening world events can change this fact. With this communion of saints we rest our souls, and we find courage to live with hope.

Christians make up a community marked by hope. Our hope is an embodied hope. Embodied in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Embodied in the lives of the saints, a vast company and communion dwelling beyond time and forever. Embodied in those we love and miss. And embodied in the stories that are being created even now.

Tell everyone you know – friend or stranger – that we are not embarrassed to live with hope. We live with the hope that our story of faith proclaims. A hope that connects us with those we love who have gone before us. Those who join us each time we gather at the communion table. Death has died and lives no longer, life with Christ is a life worth living, and we are not alone.

Amen.