YOU ARE NOT FAR…

MARK 12:28-34

OCTOBER 31, 2021

HAPPY HALLOWEEN! NOW YOU MAY NOT HEAR THAT TOO OFTEN IN CHURCH BUT TODAY IS ACTUALLY HALLOWS EVE, OR HOLY EVE, THE DAY BEFORE ALL SAINTS DAY. THAT MY FRIENDS IS SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE. AND SO I DID THE KIND OF GOOD RESEARCH EVERY BIBLICAL SCHOLAR SHOULD DO, I WENT ON A SAINT SEARCH ON THE INTERNET AND YOU SHOULD HEAR WHAT I FOUND….

DID YOU KNOW THAT ST. GUINEFORT RESCUED AN INFANT FROM A VIPER ATTACK AND IS THOUGHT TO BE, BY SOME, THE SAINT OF PROTECTION AND HEALING FOR INFANTS….OH AND ST. GUINEFORT IS A DOG!

DID YOU KNOW ST DROGO, WHO HAD A MYSTERIOUS AILMENT THAT MADE HIM PHYSICALLY REPULSIVE IS NOW CONSIDERED THE SAINT OF UNATTRACTIVE PEOPLE?

ST. LIDWINA WHO FELL WHILE ICE SKATING AT THE AGE OF 15 AND NEVER FULLY RECOVERED FROM HER INJURIES, BECAUSE OF HER PIETY SHE BECAME THE SAINT OF ICE SKATERS.

ST. ERASMUS WHO WAS PERSECUTED AS A CHRISTIAN DURING THE ROMAN EMPIRE BY BEING BEATEN, WHIPPED, PLACED IN A BARREL OF SPIKES, COVERED IN PITCH AND SET ON FIRE AND THEN HAD HIS STOMACH CUT OPEN AND HIS INTESTINES WRAPPED AROUND A WENCH IS THE SAINT OF STOMACH AILMENTS, COLIC AND APPENDICITIS.

THE LIST GOES ON; THERE IS A SAINT FOR GAMERS, THE INTERNET, TRAVEL, LEG AILMENTS, MISCARRIAGES, MURDERERS, RHEUMATISM, SWIMMERS, ADVERTISING, FOR PLUMMERS, FOR FARMERS, ETC, ETC.

BEFORE WE, AS PROTESTANTS, DISMISS THIS NOTION OF “SAINTS” AS JUST SO OUT THERE, AND IT IS A BIT, LET’S TAKE A STEP BACK AND THINK ABOUT WHAT MAKES A SAINT AND THAT IS WHERE THE SCRIPTURE FROM MARK COMES IN. SOMEONE ASK JESUS WHAT IS THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT AND JESUS RESPONDS CITING THE SHEMA FROM DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5 (THE PRAYER RECITED EVERY AM AND PM)…. “HEAR O ISRAEL THE LORD YOUR GOD IS ONE AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR MIND AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH………” AND ADDING, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF,” WHICH IS FROM LEVITICUS 19:18. JESUS SAYS THESE ARE THE TOP TWO OR THE GREATEST COMMANDMENTS. THE MAN WHO ASKED JESUS ABOUT THIS SAID YOU ARE RIGHT JESUS, THIS IS SO MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN BURNT OFFERINGS AND SACRIFICES….IN OTHER WORDS KEEPING THE RULES, BEING GOOD RELIGIOUS PEOPLE. JESUS TELLS HIM HE IS NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

LOVING GOD WITH ALL WE’VE GOT AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR AS OURSELVES IS REALLY WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A SAINT, WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CITIZEN OF THE KINGDOM. THESE SILLY SAINTS I TOLD YOU ABOUT AT THE BEGINNING WERE FOLKS WHO LOVED GOD AND LOVED THEIR NEIGHBORS AND A FEW OTHE R THINGS…..NOT SURE ABOUT THE DOG SAINT BUT HE IS ACTUALLY AN OFFICIAL SAINT JUST HAS A STRONG FOLLOWING

LET’S DO A LITTLE HISTORY LESSON ABOUT THE ALL HALLOWS EVE….CHRISTIANS CO.-OPTED THIS DAY FROM THE ANCIENT CELTS. THEY HAD A FESTIVEAL OF SAMHAIN, WHICH MEANS SUMMES END. IT WAS A TIME OF TRANSITION IN WHICH FARMERS PREPARED FOR THE COLD WINTER MONTHS THAT WERE COMING AND IT WAS A TIME WHEN THE PHYSICAL AND SUPERNATURAL WERE BELIEVED TO BE VERY CLOSE TO EACH OTHER….WE CALL THAT A LIMINAL SPACE TODAY. ANYWAY, ONCE CHRISTIANITY BECAME THE DOMINANT RELIGION OF EUROPE, THESE ANCIENT BELIEFS TOOK ON A CHRISTIAN FLAVOR. THE THOUGHT WAS THAT SOULS OF THE DEAD WOULD WANDER THE EARTH UNTIL ALL SAINTS DAY AND HALLOWEEN WAS THE LAST CHANCE FOR ANGRY GHOSTS TO GAIN VENGEANCE ON THEIR ENEMIES. SO WHAT DID CHRISITANS DO? THEY PUT ON MASKS AND COSTUME’S TO DISGUISE THEMSELVES FROM THE GHOSTS.

SO, THAT IS WHY WE CELEBRATE THOSE OF THE FAITH WHO HAVE DIED. YOU SEE THE WORD SAINT COMES FROM THE WORD, SANCTUS WHICH MEANS HOLY. SO THE FAITHFUL OR HOLY ONES WHO HAVE DIED. WE ALL KNOW SOME HOLY, FAITHFUL PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIED….RIGHT?

BUT, ARE THEY ALWAYS SO OBVIOUS? NOT ACCORDING TO MY SAINT SEARCH. BACK IN THE 1920S, A DIVORCED WOMAN WORKED FOR A SERIES OF RADICAL PERIODICALS AND LIVED A BOHEMIAN LIFE IN NEW YORK'S GREENWICH VILLAGE. IN 1927, SHE BECAME A CATHOLIC, AND THEN LED A QUIET REBELLION WITHIN THE CHURCH TO REACH OUT TO THE POOR, THE NEEDY AND THE DESPERATE. SHE WAS A PACIFIST, AN ANARCHIST AND A CRUSADER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE -- NOT YOUR STANDARD-ISSUE SAINT OR AT LEAST NOT WHAT WE TYPICALLY THINK OF WHEN WE THINK OF SAINTS. DOROTHY DAY, DURING THE DEPRESSION, SET UP A NETWORK OF SOUP KITCHENS WHERE PEOPLE COULD COME TO EAT AND SLEEP, SHE SAW HERSELF AS A SIMPLE WOMAN SEEKING TO LIVE IN THE GOSPEL -- A PERSON WHO DEMONSTRATED NOTHING MORE THAN AN INTENSE DEVOTION TO BOTH GOD AND NEIGHBOR. JESUS WOULD HAVE SAID SHE WAS NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM.

80 OR SO YEARS AGO REFUGEES FROM NAZISM CAME BY WORD OF MOUTH, TO MARSEILLE, FRANCE, FOR FALSE PASSPORTS AND EXIT VISAS, OFTEN WAITING FOR HOURS TO SEE A MYSTERIOUS YOUNG AMERICAN WITH THE KEYS TO THEIR FREEDOM: VARIAN FRY. DURING FRY'S 13 MONTHS IN EUROPE, HE WOULD HELP AT LEAST 1,500 ARTISTS AND INTELLECTUALS FLEE THE NAZIS. SOME HAVE CALLED FRY THE "AMERICAN SCHINDLER.  
VARIAN FRY, WHO WAS 32 IN 1940, WAS AN UNLIKELY SAVIOR. THIN, RESERVED, CEREBRAL, NAIVE, HE WAS A POLICY WONK, AN EDITOR AND WRITER FOR SCHOLARLY JOURNALS. HE'D TAKEN AN EYE-POPPING TRIP TO HITLER'S GERMANY IN 1935. AND AFTER FRANCE FELL IN JUNE 1940, FRY AND A GROUP OF OTHER NEW YORK INTELLECTUALS CREATED THE EMERGENCY RESCUE COMMITTEE AND DECIDED TO TRY TO SAVE THEIR ENDANGERED EUROPEAN COUNTERPARTS. ...HE CARRIED A LIST OF 200-SOME NAMES AND A $3,000 BANKROLL TAPED TO HIS LEG. ... SOON, THE NUMBER OF NAMES ON FRY'S LIST GREW INTO THE THOUSANDS. AFTER IT WAS ALL OVER, HE SAID, HE'D REVIEWED 15,000 CASES. AND IN THE END, HE'D RESCUED THINKERS, SCIENTISTS, ARTISTS AND POLITICIANS WHO, AT ANY MOMENT, ACCORDING TO THE LANGUAGE OF THE LAW, COULD HAVE BEEN FORCED TO "SURRENDER ON DEMAND" TO THE AUTHORITIES OF OCCUPIED FRANCE. USING EVERY MEANS POSSIBLE -- MOST OF THEM ILLEGAL -- FRY SMUGGLED THEM TO SAFETY. A MAN INTENSELY DEVOTED TO GOD AND NEIGHBOR. JESUS WOULD HAVE SAID VARIAN FRY WAS NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM.

BOTH DOROTHY AND VARIAN ARE CONSIDERED SAINTS. BUT YOU KNOW WHAT, YOU DON’T HAVE TO SAVE PEOPLE FROM THE MONSTERS OR SET UP SOUP KITCHENS, BUT YOU COULD. BUT WHAT IS BEING ASKED OF EACH OF US, IS TO BE SAINTS RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW. PEOPLE WHO LOVE GOD WITH EVERYTHING WE ARE AND HAVE AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS AS MUCH AS WE LOVE OURSELVES. WHAT WILL THAT LOOK LIKE? IT COULD BE SOMETHING SMALL OR SOMETHING GREAT BUT TO LOVE GOD AND LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR REQUIRES US TO DO SOMETHING, VOLUNTEER, BE KIND TO SOMEONE TODAY, WRITE A LETTER TO YOUR SENATOR,

THIS HALLOWS EVE, THIS HOLY NIGHT, I WANT TO HEAR JESUS SAY, SAINTS YOU ARE NOT FAR FROM THE KINGDOM……..