

Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

November 2, 2025

The Saintly Disinherited

[Readings](#)

[Bulletin](#)

Beloved by God, my siblings in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Creator and our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

When you think of saints, what images, thoughts, or memories come to mind? Who are the saints? What makes a person a saint? What does saintly living look like? We are gathered this morning to remember and celebrate all the saints who have gone before us and know rest in Christ. We are also gathered this morning, as we are every Sunday, to be equipped and readied for the daily ministries of our various vocations. We can accomplish both objectives this morning by wrestling with these opening questions.

Who are the saints? We have a variety of terms used in our reading today for the saints. In Daniel, we hear of the *qaddiysh*, the “holy ones of the Most High.”¹ Here, the saints are those who endure the hardships of the world. In the prophet’s time, this was mainly the oppressive forces of the various empires surrounding and threatening the people of God.

In our Psalm, we hear again of the *qaddiysh*, translated here as “faithful ones.” The psalmist describes the saints as the faithful throng who rejoice, praise, dance, play instruments, exult in God’s glory, and sing for joy.² The psalm takes a turn, however, with the faithful then joining in God’s wrathful judgement of the nations, people, kings, and nobles.³

¹ Daniel 7:18a (NRSVUE)

² Psalm 149:1-5 (NRSVUE)

³ Psalm 149:6-9 (NRSVUE)

This understanding of saints in the Hebrew bible some out of the Israelite understanding of sacredness. The saints, the holy ones, in both Daniel and Psalm 149 are those set apart for a particular work. That works largely centers around praising and glorifying God, even in the midst of trial and tribulation.

In Ephesians the author uses *hagios* for “saints” in verse 15. Like *qaddiysh* there is an element of set-apart-ness in the meaning of this word. The root in the Greek, *hagos*, is most literally “different.”⁴ Perhaps a more literal translation here would be along the lines of “reverently different” or “different from the mundane.”

We see a through-line of being set apart as fundamental to the understanding of the saints, at least in Epistles and Hebrew Bible. But I’m not entirely sure that was Jesus’ understanding of being a saint. In the regular understanding we often think of anointing or calling. An outward, visible sign that someone has dedicated their lives to living a particular way. Say the word “saint” and people are likely thinking of Mother Theresa or Francis of Assisi. It’s easy to see people like that as saints, they live in very obviously different or set-apart ways.

To be honest, such thinking seems to me to be along the lines of the Pharisees and other religiously strict folk. Be wary that being seen as being different (seen as saintly) doesn’t become the end in and of itself. Jesus seems less interested in the sort of actions that are **seen as** saintly, and far more interested in actions that **are** saintly. And what’s the defining factor for Jesus on that? Not just living different from the mundane, from the world; but living contrary to it.

Saintly living means setting aside the priorities and values of the world. It means being contrary to much of the world’s values. It means overturning

⁴ Thayer's Greek Lexicon, STRONGS NT 40: ἅγιος

money-lending tables in the Temple and breaking the silly rules the hypocrites used to take advantage of others. Sainthood is responding to violence with dignity and love. It is saying that wealth does not make someone more important than others; and neither does power or influence.

Sainthood recognizes the worth and dignity of all life. It treats others the way they wish to be treated. Sainthood allows space for people to grow and mature. Sainthood is concerned with wholeness, peace, and justice. It seeks to bless others rather than compete or oppress. Sainthood is grounded in love and community.

This sort of sainthood, concerned with wholeness, peace, and justice; grounded in love and community, is the living heart of the Gospel. It is the core message of Jesus that turns the world's power structure upside down. It is why our reading from Luke's Gospel is so shocking to the comfortable. Jesus doesn't bless the rich, the powerful, or the well-fed. He stands on level ground with his disciples and blesses the ones the world ignores. Jesus stands in solidarity with the disinherited of the world, with the poor, the hungry, the grieving, the outcast. And in standing with them Jesus sees them, sees their pain and suffering. And Jesus calls these ones blessed. Jesus sees the disinherited as set apart from the world...largely by the world's exclusionary framework...and calls them blessed, turns them into saints.

The great theologian and mystic, Howard Thurman, understood this fundamental truth of Christ's message. He wrote, "The religion of Jesus is a religion of the dispossessed."

Thurman's words compel us to recognize a profound spiritual reality: the **disinherited are the saints**. To be a saint, a *hagios*, a reverently different one, is not simply to be separated *from* the world, but to be actively and reverently **set apart with** the disinherited, the very people Jesus names as holy and blessed. Sainthood is found not in achieving worldly success or

personal piety, but in aligning ourselves entirely with those whose lives are antithetical to worldly power.

Thurman continues, “The solution which Jesus found for himself and for Israel, as they faced the hostility of the Greco-Roman world, becomes the word and the work of redemption for all the cast-down people in every generation and in every age. I mean this quite literally.... The basic fact is that Christianity as it was born in the mind of this Jewish teacher and thinker appears as a technique for survival for the oppressed.... Wherever his spirit appears, the oppressed gather fresh courage; for he announced the good news that fear, hypocrisy, and hatred, the three hounds of hell that track the trail of the disinherited, need have no dominion over them.”⁵

To answer the call to saintly living, we must understand that our holiness is found in entering the condition of the beatitudes. Our daily vocations become holy when they serve as a living echo of Luke's Gospel, where the poor, the hungry, and the weeping are the central figures of God's kingdom.

Saintly living means:

- **Standing with the poor**, not offering abstract charity, but committing to concrete acts of justice and advocacy that dismantle the systems that keep the **disinherited** oppressed.
- **Feasting with the hungry now**, by ensuring equity in food distribution and seeking true abundance for those who lack it.
- **Mourning with the weeping**, by sitting in radical solidarity and refusing to minimize the suffering of those our society dismisses.
- **Embracing the excluded and reviled**, by making space at our tables and in our institutions for those whom the world has cast out, recognizing them as Christ's beloved.

⁵ Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston, Ma, Beacon Press, 1976CE. pp.18-19.

This week, let us leave this place not simply remembering the saints of the past, but ready to become the saints of the present. May we have the courage to live a life marked by a fierce love for the disinherited, for in serving them, we follow the one who blessed them, and in doing so, we find our own wholeness and true holiness. Amen.