

November 1, 2020
Rev. Meagan Sherman-Sporrong
All Saints Day

On Tuesday, I will wake up at 4:00 a.m. to get ready to head to the polling place in my neighborhood so I can be an election judge. This is something I thought about doing since my mom died three years ago. She was always an election judge at her polling place—for probably a decade. It was something she was really proud of and something she enjoyed doing. She made friends with the co-judges over the years. I wanted to honor her and offer to be a judge. This was before we needed people to be polling judges because of a virus that is surging again.

On Tuesday I will help people do their civic duty and vote in national and local elections. I will probably cry at some point during the day because I will think about all those before me who made this right available for all the people who will come through my polling place to vote. One hundred years ago, I couldn't vote. My ancestors fought for women to have the right to vote. So I vote. My mom served her country as an election judge, so I will honor her and do the same.

We do these kinds of things to honor our ancestors. We are able to do these things BECAUSE of our ancestors.

Our ancestors are who shape us and form us into who we are today. All our interactions meld into the creation of who we are. And our saints are the ones that we honor and recognize, the ones we acknowledge how they shaped us in some way. On this All Saints Day, we think about our loved ones. We think about the ones who have gone on before us—our parents; grandparents; children; for some, grandchildren. We think of spouses and siblings. We remember former Sunday school teachers and pastors. All the people that we miss and loved.

We celebrate this All Saints Day in the reality of death. We get a daily death count on the news at night, and right now that number is rising each day. We had a member of our congregation, one of our saints, die from this virus that is causing so much chaos in our lives. This morning I went over to the church to ring the bell for our four saints in the congregation: Lorraine Johnson, Doris Mellinger, Ingie Vruno, and Laurie Bujalka. Then I ran the bell another 42 times, one for each life in Norridge lost to Covid this year. This is our reality.

Maybe it is the fact that death is so front and center that this All Saints Day feels a little heavier for me. It may be that I returned to hospice work for a few hours each week, and I am personally seeing the way Covid is hitting families. It may be that I have done at least a dozen neighborhood funerals since March. Not all Covid deaths, a few were, but the funerals are—there are no other words for it—weird. We can't grieve the way our culture requires. There is no hugging, no meals after the service, which are shorter, and there are less people. We are surrounded by death, and we can't even grieve the way we need to.

We lost so much this year. It sucks. It makes me mad. It makes me exhausted. It makes me sad. And it makes me realize that my ancestors have gone through just as bad or worse, and not only did they survive, their experience made me able to survive this experience. Experiences like this tend to strengthen our faith and soften our hearts. I honestly do not know how I would have gotten through some of these pandemic days if it wasn't for my faith and trust that God protects us and guides us when things seem impossible.

God took care of Moses when he was trying to convince the pharaoh to free the slaves of Egypt. Moses didn't want to be the person to work with God, but he found the words and the tactics, and he was finally able to

soften the pharaoh's heart. It took plagues, It took bugs, darkness, wild animals—but eventually the pharaoh's heart was softened, and he set the slaves free. God sent prophets when the world felt scary and things were out of whack. Micha reminded the people that they shall act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. They called people to turn from riches and care for the poor. God sent these prophets because we needed them. They are our ancestors whom we learn from, can use to remind us of what is important, and give us clues for how to turn our focus back to God. Then God came to us in Jesus, and we have a series of ancestors who God worked through to teach us, again, when things were out of whack. When the poor were too poor and the rich too rich, God came on earth in the form of Jesus to remind us that we are to love one another and that when you love in the way God created us to love, it is the kind of love that Jesus has for all people. That is the love God came to the earth to teach us about. That is the love our ancestors were exposed to and the ones who taught the ones who taught the ones that we learned from. Our ancestors taught us about the love of God. And because of our ancestors we know how to live in this time of death.

We love. We love our neighbor as God loves the world. We listen to our ancestors who God spoke through each time things felt crazy and out of balance. We are reminded that God calls us to love our neighbor as God loves us. We love our neighbors as much as we love God. We love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. This is radical love. This is a love that we can only even begin to understand because of our saints being examples of that love to us.

So this week it will feel like the fate of the world is hanging on one day. But remember that God sent people who taught us how to journey through this time. God taught us how to love, how to love deeply, how to love completely.

Lorraine taught us how to love. Doris taught us how to love. Ingie taught us how to love. Laurie taught us how to love. What I've learned about these women over the past year is that they touched many lives. They loved deeply, but each in her own way: Lorraine through working with kids, Ingie through her love for her family and God, and Laurie through her joy and love of life. These are amazing examples of how to love like God. And when our saints move on and go home, we have their examples of love to guide us on how to experience God. When we love, we experience God.

A poem:

Jesus Meet Me in This Place by Gina Langferman

Jesus, meet me in this place,
I need Your love and grace,
I need to feel You near.
Jesus, meet me in this place,
I'm trying hard to pray
And not give in to fear.
Please be always right beside me,
Let Your Spirit guide me,
Help me walk this road.
You will carry all my burdens,
You have come to save us,
You'll carry this load.

Jesus, be my gentle shepherd,
Lead me through this valley,
To Your light and truth.
Jesus, thank You for Your promise
You will never leave me,
Hold me close to You.
Help me praise You as my heart grows
Stronger in my faith
And strengthen those I love.
Help us always to stay near You,
Offering our heartfelt prayers to God above.
Amen

Originally published at <https://www.archindy.org/criterion/local/2020/05-01/poems.html>