

*On Our Doorposts, and on Our Gates, and on Our Hearts...*

If you haven't moved from one home to another in recent memory, I want to let you in on a little insight that those of us who have no doubt share. It's one of those insights that tend to be forgotten quickly, so I'm going to share it with you while it is still fresh on my mind. This is Gospel Truth, and you can take it to the bank. You can test this assumption, but I am convinced you will find it to be true. Are you ready for it?

*Moving is for the birds.*

This is not a commentary on our enthusiasm to be here, we love Philadelphia and we love being her at First Church. But it is to say that moving houses is just well, dreadful.

Moving is a great way to streamline your life. Until, that is, it is actually time to move and then you just dump things in boxes.

And then at the other end, you start unloading boxes and wonder what in the world was going through your mind that it made sense to bring *that*.

Unpacking is simply an exercise in *getting done*.

It is punctuated with moments of panic when you can't locate those things you actually cherish and you're sure they are lost, sent off to parts unknown.

There are boxes and boxes of stuff you use and you can't get by without it... all of those cell phone charging cables that you can't remember which one goes to which phone you no longer have.

And then there is the stuff you care about, that serves no earthly purpose, other than to ground our lives in memory. If you move houses, you'll see what is really important to you.

Pictures. Letters. Granddaddy's Harmonica. The clock. The Teddy Bear.

All Saints' is a moment in which we pause, in the midst of the church year, to give thanks to God for those who have gone before us.

I don't need to pull on your heartstrings for you to know who that may be. You know who is foundational in your life. Perhaps it is a member of your family, maybe a friend. Perhaps they are with us still, perhaps they passed in death into the more immediate presence of Jesus Christ.

But you know who they are. The experiences we share with those closest to us ground us.

Places are foundational to us also. If I close my eyes, and slow down for just a moment, I can still remember almost every detail of the way my grandparents' home smelled, and I can

remember the quiet calm that I felt there. And without much effort, I can remember the boisterous, joyful, loud way that my parents' home sounded when we all still lived close by and would gather for meals there... places are foundational to us. Remember the places of your life, the Sanctuary where you shared your marriage vows, the quad of your college where deep friendships were formed and identity was formed as well. Places are foundational for us.

Words can be foundational.

The Words of the Creed – I believe in the Holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the resurrection of the Body, and the Life everlasting...

The Words of Institution – On the night of his arrest, our Lord took bread and blessed it, and broke it...

The Words of Baptism – In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost...

These are the words that tell us who we are, and that tell us that God is with us. Words can be foundational.

When Jesus was approached by scribes asking what the greatest commandment was, his answer was grounded in the faith that was his foundation... "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'"

He didn't just make that up on the spot. That's an old Creed of Judaism. Those are the foundational words of his Jewish faith.

So much is this the case that when Moses comes down from Sinai with the Law, the gift of God that would ultimately give the people of God the foundations of their community, he brings this order: "Inscribe it on your doorposts and on your gates."

Put it where you are going to see it. Make these words part of who you are. Make them as much a part of who you are as the people you love, indeed, make these words the basis for the love you have for each other by remembering the God who has made us all, in whom we live and to whom we return in death.

Jesus doesn't offer a glib response, he offers the words that shaped the core of his faith.

All Saints' is the day we remember the people who made us who we are, who offered to us the words of faith, and nurtured and guided and accompanied us on the journey that brought us to this present moment.

And All Saints' is also the day when we are reminded that we, too, are foundational people for one another. We are the church, this precious body gathered in this moment, with all the history we share together – I'm very aware that I am one of the newest people in this room, that I'm joining a story that is already in progress, and that you all have the knowledge of one another that can only come with time and the recollection of who stole whose Tupperware and

who never takes dishwasher duty, and who can be a little irritable when she doesn't get her way, and who puts out the best cookies for fellowship hour. And who wrote you that beautiful note when your grandmother died. That's what it means to have a common life together.

It also means that these words that we are to inscribe on our doorposts and on our gates, and frankly, in our hearts, are also the words that bind us together. All Saints' is also a day that we pause to give thanks to God *for all who presently journey alongside us*.

There is a story that is told of the late William Sloane Coffin, a saint in whose words I have found comfort and challenge for years. Coffin was the chaplain of Yale University, whom Garry Trudeau used as the model minister in the comic strip *Doonesbury*. Later in his life when was the pastor of the Riverside Church in New York City, tragedy struck his family as his son Alex was killed in a single car accident driving to Boston. The words of Coffin's sermon at his son's grave are among the most hauntingly beautiful testimonies of faith in the face of doubt as can be found anywhere. The story goes that the following Easter, as the glorious organ began the chords of the Easter Hymn and the congregation leapt to its feet to sing of the resurrection, Coffin said that he couldn't make the words come out. They stuck in his throat, and he couldn't sing them. But then he said he realized that he didn't have to be able to sing them. That the gathered congregation was singing *for* him. If his faith faltered, theirs was strong.

Friends, that is what is to be the church. We are foundational for one another. Those who have gone before us have laid the foundations for us and gifted us with words of Faith, words imprinted on their hearts as surely as their doorposts and gates. To be church is to be the communion of the saints, it is to return, again and again, to this table in the sure and certain knowledge that we are gathered with believers of every time and place.

To be the communion of the saints is to lay foundations for those who will come after us, to write the words so indelibly into the stones that they will stand in mute testimony to the one who has loved us into being, and taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, Amen.