

Le Chambon is a small Protestant village in the mountains of France. During the madness of World War II while France was under the control of the Vichy government—a Nazi puppet state—something amazing happened in this village, something that can only be called a miracle. In the midst of the Nazi's never ending quest to capture, jail, torture, and exterminate every Jewish person in Europe the people of Le Chambon resisted the evil forces of the Holocaust. Even as Nazi informers and SS Guards stormed their city, infiltrated their church, arrested their spiritual leaders, and attempted to break the town's spirit all the people of Le Chambon continued to shelter every Jewish person they could find, hiding them in their homes, educating them in their schools, feeding them with what little food they had. For all four years of the Nazi occupation of France the people of Le Chambon stood as a beacon of hope as they opened their homes and their hearts to Jewish refugees fleeing the madness that was the Holocaust.

In the course of World War II this small mountain village of common people sheltered and saved thousands of Jewish refugees¹ showing them hospitality, and guiding them through the treacherous mountain passes to safety in Switzerland. Amazingly all of this life-saving operation occurred with no violence, and no use of force and it was led by the local Protestant church and its pacifist pastor—Andre Trocmé. Under his spiritual leadership and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit he and the rest of his congregation, all the members of the town, every man, woman and child stood up to the evil of Nazism and through the power of love saved life after life, child after child, seeing each and every refugee as a child of God. It was through the incredible Christian belief that we are to love others as ourselves, that we are to resist evil no matter what the cost, that the Christian people of Le Chambon saved thousands of Jews even as they risked their very lives. It was through their actions, actions that they claimed were caused by simple common sense and Christian love that the people of Le Chambon demonstrate to us, to the Church and to the world what it is to be saints of God—people who, through baptism and following the teachings of Christ, change the world and let the Kingdom of God become visible here on earth as it is in heaven. My sisters and brothers, this is who we are called to be as the saints of God, no more and no less than people who change the course of history.

Today we celebrate the ancient festival of All Saints Day, one of the seven major feast days of the Church. As early as 270 AD the Church began to celebrate the Christian faithful of the past who have preceded us and given us an example of true Christian life.² In remembering all those who through baptism and a life of devotion are connected to us as members of the mystical Body of Christ we too remember our Christian calling which we entered into on the day of our Baptism. On that day we promised to follow and obey Jesus Christ as our Lord and in so doing, work to make God's peaceful, and loving kingdom present through the life of the Church.

As we remember the saints of the past who have worked to be people of the Kingdom of God we also look forward with joy to the saints of the future who will continue Christ's mission here along with us. We join with Vincent, Madeline, Jack, and Elizabeth as they are baptized today into Christ's Church and we celebrate the fact that they join with us and the saints of the past in promising to seek and serve all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves.³ We too join with them in promising to proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ, the Good News that life has conquered death, the Good News of God's incredible love for this world.

¹ Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, New York: Harper Perennial, 1994, 11.

² *Lesser Feasts and Fasts-2000*. New York: Church Publishing, 2001, 416.

³ *Book of Common Prayer*. New York: Church Publishing, 1979, 303-305.

We join with all the saints in the commitment to be people of the Kingdom of God—a kingdom that is summed up in the words of Jesus’ beatitudes in Luke which we heard this morning. These words which speak of the Kingdom of God, of Jesus’ very mission here on earth, challenge and comfort us all at the same time. The Good News that Christ proclaimed of God’s kingdom is that the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful are to be comforted and remembered even as our world seems so intent of forgetting them and leaving them behind. Today we are reminded that as Christians we are called to stand up for those who have no voice, to stand up for those who are cold and hungry, to stand up for those who mourn. Today we remember that this is the very way that Christ himself lived while he was among us, as one who reached out to the rejected, as one who offered hope to the hopeless, as one who brought good news to the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned, who brought new life to you, to me, to the village of Le Chambon, and to Vincent, Madeline, Jack, and Elizabeth (who will be baptized later today).

Today we are reminded by the saints of the past, the saints of the present, and the saints of the future that we have died to sin in our baptisms, have been raised in the new life of Jesus Christ, and are called to live no longer for ourselves but instead for God in working to be part of the Kingdom of God. Today, we remember who we are—the saints of God, the people of God who are called to carry on Jesus’ amazing, life-changing, world-transforming work in this broken and hurting world. Today, along with all the saints throughout all time and space both near and far, we are called to recommit ourselves to that work of Christ’s kingdom here on earth.

It is that kingdom that we proclaim today as we celebrate all the saints and as we welcome even more saints into the life of the Church. It is the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom that creates towns like Le Chambon, people like Martin Luther King Jr., and Desmond Tutu and Mother Theresa, the kingdom that creates hope for the poor, joy for the sorrowful, fullness for the hungry, new life for those who are dying, it is that Kingdom that we celebrate today and it is that Kingdom that we strive to bring ever more into being here at St. John’s through mission and ministry, through education and stewardship, through wreath sales and Bible studies. It is that Kingdom that we look forward to even in the midst of economic hardship, war, violence, political mudslinging, hunger and addiction. Even in the midst of the sadness and sin of our broken world we, the saints of God, are people of hope because of that Kingdom which Christ himself embodies that Kingdom of which we are a part. Today we celebrate this reality of God’s life-changing presence with us and through us. We rejoice in the fact that God has called us, even you and me, to be people of this Kingdom of new hope, people who continue to transform the world through the resurrected life of Jesus Christ. We, the people of St. John’s, along with all the saints are called to go forth in mission, to bring Good News to the entire creation, to invite our neighbors, our friends, our enemies, strangers, people with whom we see eye to eye and people with whom we vehemently disagree to invite **all** of God’s creation to new life in Christ. That is our goal as people of the kingdom, people of new life, people of healing, people of mission, people of love, people who resist death and hatred through the power of God’s love, hospitality, and faith. As we stand and recommit ourselves to Christ our Lord (along with Vincent, Madeline, Jack, and Elizabeth) may we be filled with his grace and power to be agents of God’s kingdom of love and life and thus be part of the healing of this sin sick and broken world.