

Meditation on the Theme: “Where the Saints Have Trod”

Hebrews 12: 1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

On All Saints Day, we are reminded that we are part of a bigger story. Like Elephant and Piggie, our lives are read just as we’ve read the lives of others. Of course, the page number when the book ends is unknown. But until it does we all feel like we have more to give. More words. More jokes. More “Bananas.”

The writer of Hebrews says we are all part of a much broader story. One that has seen persecution and violence. One that knows the pains of injustice hidden in our systems and institutions—including the church. It has all happened before. And in the midst of our pursuit for God’s peace and justice we are to look at these stories because there are moments when we will grow weary. When we will be tempted to do what is comfortable rather than bold. Or do what is safe rather than what is daring. And during these times we are to remember we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses who know exactly what it is like to be part of the story.

The great cloud—it’s an image going back to the Israelites wandering the desert. Freed slaves being guided both day and night by a great cloud as they traveled through the dangerous unknown. Their stories were read often just as our stories will be read one day by the saints who follow us.

So Dellabrook and Trinity. The question is: What is the story people will read about us someday? You know, I spoke with Rev. Eversley a few days before he died. He preached at the minister’s conference on a 400 year history of being Black in our country. He recited poetry by Howard Thurman from memory. He quoted paragraphs from David Walker’s appeal—who was a Black abolitionist written in 1829 who wrote for Black unity and self-help in the fight against slavery. Carlton theologized and preached at a level I had never witnessed before. So I called him that night—because I couldn’t text or email him!—and told him how remarkable it was. And as we were about to hang up he said, “Reverend, our churches need to do more things together.” A few days later he was gone. And then a few months later Covid happened, and we all did our own thing. But now, here we are. I still hear his voice encouraging us to work together to make life better for everyone.

We have a unique and magnificent cloud surrounding us. For that we are truly blessed. Their stories still read and rehearsed, just as our stories will be read and rehearsed someday.

So what does the next chapter of the story look like? And while the page number for when that story ends is unknown, until then, may we be empowered by God’s Spirit to know, we still have more to give. More words. More jokes. More love. Amen.