

**Don Brown
St. Mary the Virgin, SF
Stewardship Ingathering
All Saints' Sunday
11.6.16**

There is a fashion fad in shoes for special high heels, referred to as spike, or stiletto, heels. These shoes have remarkable power. A person weighing 120 pounds exerts thousands of pounds of pressure per square inch every time a step is taken. If the rubber around the heel has worn off and the actual metal spike is exposed, the pressure exceeds 25 tons per square inch, much more if that person weighs more. Individuals, large and small, have been leaving trillions of tiny pockmarks in vinyl and wood floors all over the country.

Contrast that with an elephant walking on the same vinyl or wood floor. An elephant weighing about seven tons exerts only about 50 pounds of pressure per square inch on such floors.

The differences between elephants and humans are many but in this case the difference is in the way the force of the weight of each is applied to the surface of the floor. The weight of the elephant is spread over four very large feet while the weight of a 120-pound person is concentrated on two tiny heels that are less than 1/2 inch square.

Today is All Saints' Sunday and today you, the members and friends of St. Mary's are being asked to bring your pledges forward to the altar at the time of the offertory.

What do spike heels and elephants have to do with either of these emphases? Just this.....marks are made in this world by people who are committed to concentrating their energies, their weight as it were....people who get specific and particular.

Good intentions, not acted upon, never accomplish much of anything. It's only when a person, good or bad, makes the decision to live the Christian life in tangible ways, that he or she makes a mark of God's love and saving grace on the world. It's only in such particularity that a Christian's heavenly purposes become of any earthly value.

Today is all Saints' Sunday when we remember people, ordinary people, who, because they cared passionately about living a life that honored God and thus made a tangible difference in the world and that's why they are remembered as saints. These saints run the gamut from St. Matthew, the tax collector disciple of Jesus, to Jonathan Daniels, a student from the seminary I attended, who died in 1965, protecting a black teenager in Alabama from a shotgun blast that had been fired by a white deputy sheriff.

St. Paul wrote in his Letter to the Ephesians, that we heard earlier in this service, "I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints." Saints are much more than the images we see in stained glass windows. For the most part, they are ordinary people who are flawed human beings like all of us.

A Sunday school student when asked what a saint is, remembering those stained glass window saints responded, "Saints are people the light of God shines through."

Song writer and singer, Leonard Cohen, gets at a similar notion in his song "Anthem" when he sings,

Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack, a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in.

Each of us at St. Mary's is called to be the best saint we can be in this Christian community. One of the responsibilities we have is to keep our community healthy and strong through the financial support we give. This is one way to help St. Mary's remain a strong beacon of love and hope. This is also the way we, who have been saved by Grace, make that grace tangible in the world around us.

On this All Saints' Sunday we are reminded that God expects us as his people to follow the examples of the saints and make our mark in this world. Good thoughts are not enough. Concern is not enough.

The faith and love we profess for Jesus in our baptismal vows is to be expressed in how we live our lives through concrete actions. What you give and how you live, these are decisions and expressions that only you can decide upon as you make your mark upon this world. Whatever your decision, let your decision be made in love and lived in joy.

In baptisms down through the centuries, countless individuals have been marked with the sign of the cross--- the sign of Gods self-giving, sacrificial love for us. Down through the centuries multitudes of saints have lovingly left their mark, an expression of that same divine love, upon this world.

Today we give God thanks and praise for the blessed gifts of the saints, and especially I hope you will remember those people who have marked your life with their particular expressions of Christ's love.

We also give God thanks and praise for those whose generosity has sustained the witness of the Episcopal Church of St. Mary the Virgin for 125 years.

Remember, too, that what you do as you walk through this life does make a difference. May the mark you make here at St. Mary's and in the world beyond these beloved walls be a firm, strong, positive testimony to your faith in the living God who loves you now and always. Amen