**21 Pentecost, Nov 2, 2014, Josh 3:7-17, Ps 107 Thess 2:9-13, Matt 23:1-12;The Rev. Mary S. Trainor**

Jesus said: "***do what they teach and follow it....for you have one teacher, and you are all students..."*** Hmmmmm. We live in a culture that does not like to obey authority. In fact, recently obedience has become a bad word because it is incompatible with what we seek: independence, individualism, doing our own thing our own way. And here Jesus is calling us all His students regardless of our age! As believers, we are all in the process of learning how to be better disciples of Jesus. A disciple is a follower, a student; we are to listen, study, learn, be humble before our God, and we are to put into action what we learn. Practicing what we preach and being Jesus' students are not easy, but it is what God expects.

The people Jesus is speaking with in today's Gospel are not bad people. In fact, they have spent much of their life studying God's word and the religious law. They are devoted to serving God, but have gotten mixed up along the way of how to do this faithfully. They see themselves as THE authority and they ensure that others know of their power and piety. They take positions of power at banquets and they wear these little boxes (called ***phylacteries***) containing Scripture passages on their foreheads. In doing so, they are setting themselves apart showing others how religious they are. Yet Jesus says, ***"The greatest among you will be your servant... ....all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted."*** In other words, oh my, these scribes and Pharisees who parade around with great authority are not obeying God -- they are missing the point. They are not living as disciples of God, but of themselves. With obedience to and learning from God comes humility. We are to point to Jesus with our lives.

Today we celebrate All Saints' Day, a special day when we remember the faithful departed, those who have gone before us to heaven. It is like that: gathered around this altar (which extends miles out through the wall) are white robed saints singing glory to God and encouraging us on our journey. Oh, most of them had long, painful, and arduous journeys here on earth. The saints are not perfect people who had things all figured out, but rather were people whose lives included faithful discipleship. In the face of difficulty, they each lifted up their hearts to the Lord in praise and prayer. By their example, they help us learn about God's love, God's authority, and the importance of being obedient to God. They paved the way before us, they prayed and prayed in these very pews. Where would we be without them? God makes it clear to us through their example that all the stuff of this earth (e.g., murders, disease, thieves, abusers, cheats) has no power compared to Him; He has the last word.

Della Mae was a saint, and my mother-in-law. She would sing around their house old hymns like "Precious Lord" and "Old Rugged Cross." She was born in Nashville; you could hear country soul in her singing. And as she sang, her voice would shake with emotion and you really felt Jesus near you. Della Mae oozed Jesus' love; as you visited with her, she listen with intensity, and share her wisdom in the most loving way. Oh Della Mae was not perfect. She was very stubborn, and you sure wanted to stay on her good side - but oh my, she could help you claim God's love. Della Mae had spent a lot of time with the Lord through her 82 years, even after she had a massive stroke and was diagnosed with Parkinson's Disease. God's love kept flowing out of her. She understood what it meant to be a humble disciple of the Lord's.

Lauren Hill is a modern day disciple, soon to be a saint. She is a 19 year old basketball player from the University of Cincinnati who will be with the Lord soon. She has an incurable, aggressive and rare form of cancer. I read about her in the newspaper's Sports Page. She has a great resolve to follow our Lord. Oh Lauren has asked God for a cure, and she knows that God has answered her prayer in a way different than a cure. She says that what keeps her going "**is remembering why I'm here;"** Lauren sees herself as a disciple, and that our purpose here on earth is to "**both teach and be taught."** "**Lauren will shine brightly until her light is extinguished,"** the article says. Lauren knows her mission in life is for God, and she is living it daily for as long as she's got.

In today's letter to the Thessalonians, St Paul speaks about this: the importance of our passing on the Gospel to others in our lives. Paul said, "***you accepted it (the Bible) not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is... at work in you believers***." And, as Paul says, we live to "***lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into His own kingdom and glory***." This is not a part time thing or a Sunday-only thing. Oh, in our culture we don't like committing to things any more than we like authority -- but being a Christian requires commitment. This is an all-the-time thing. The good news is that we are not alone. Paul uses "we, us/our" as pronouns seven times in this short passage, and uses the imagery of a family for the church community. We have God's help and the encouragement of each other! **We** have the encouragement of the saints. The next time you are discouraged or fearful, just remember all those saints cheering you on. It's like they are saying "Get up, you can do this, you have help in living out and sharing your faith. Yes, you can!" Della Mae knew this, Lauren knows this, and you are assured of it today. God's ***word is at work in*** us!

We are called to be faithful and obedient, not perfect or even successful. Yes, we have an authority, yes, we are to be obedient, yes, we are to be humble before God. We are still here, so we aren't saints yet; we are called to ***lead a life worthy of God***, with God's help and each other. We are to encourage one another, meet with one another, pray with one another. We are made holy as we follow Christ, as we study at His feet, and in the process we fulfill our purpose. God has called YOU to be His disciple.

Let us pray together the prayer for mission on the top of page 101 in BCP and the collect for today, All Saints Day, found on the bottom of page 245:

"**Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hardwood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace; So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen.**

**Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.**