

# Sermon Text for October 30, 2016

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## *I Samuel 16:6-13, Romans 1:1-7*

“Called to be Saints”

We are one year away from the 500 year celebration of the Protestant Reformation. I know it isn't something that you and your kids sit around the dinner table talking about. But imagine if you lived in a time where your religion dictated where you worked, who you married, the circles you ran in. The church in Luther's day was all in Latin and nobody but the priests were able to read the Scripture. The Scripture, this wonderful Word of God which we have embraced as the light unto our path. It is basically a 500 year celebration of when the Word of God was returned to the people. This Word which today 4 of our children claimed as their own in the presentation of the Bibles. This Sunday is a big deal.

Today we are also embarking on a new adventure for our sermon series. Over the past 5 years we have looked at John, the Apostles Creed, James, and finally Genesis. How many of you have been here for the entire journey so far? It doesn't end. In fact, today we start with a complete series on Paul's letter to the Romans. Do not be fooled, this letter is one of substance, it is not for the faint of heart. In Corinthians Paul tells the church of the city of Corinth that they were not ready, they couldn't handle anything but the milk of the Gospel. Romans is a T-bone steak, a letter that the more you gnaw and chew on the more it produces spiritual meat and truths and insights. We are going to cut down the letter to bite sized, edible portions.

Paul begins his letter by calling us to a life set apart from culture, a life holy to God, he tells us that we are all called to be saints. In our first Scripture, another one of my favorite ones, we find David who is set apart from his brothers and chosen to be the king of the land. He is called to live for God. Let's see what it means when we hear that we are called to be saints and how we can apply it to our lives today in this time in which we are living.

Over this past week I had a chance to spend some time on the West Coast, San Francisco to be precise. What an amazing place, we saw Lombard street where I really felt like the car was going to fall over on the street it was so steep. We crossed the Golden Gate Bridge and saw dolphin in Bay and were along the coast of route 1. I had a chance to see again people that I had not seen in decades who are professors in Northern

California as my youngest is starting to think about that. But California, and San Francisco is so different from what I'm used to. My friend who is a professor at Stanford spoke about his colleague who teaches a class with him and he said that his colleague's husband, so both men, is a pastor and works closely in the theater community. It took me a while to digest that single sentence so he slowed down for me. Things are different out there.

In Paul's letter to the Romans we hear him tell this community that he had never met, but that he admires, that it is clear that they have an understanding that their faith is not something that is just a part of their life, but that it must be something that affects dictates every single aspect of their life. In his first seven verses, in his greeting to the community we hear him tell them that he knows that God has a plan and purpose for all of us, but in order for us to find and live in God's plan and purpose, we must strive to live as people who are set apart, called to be saints. Ironically when we find ourselves on this Sunday as we celebrate All Saint's Day on Monday, a day that we remember in the Christian Church those who went before us. The saints, as Hebrews reminds us, are those who kept the faith and continue to keep the faith. That's is, after all who Paul is writing to in Romans, and he isn't writing to the dead. Let's unravel what these first seven verses of Romans mean to us.

Paul's letter to the Romans is his longest and most important letter. Remember, Paul wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament. It is a letter written and intended for practicing Christians. Actually if you stop and think about it every single word in the New Testament is written and directed to the Christian, to those in the early church, not to the unbeliever and the pagan. The New Testament is a manual of operations for the Christian Church, so the words ought to be convicting to us, not to our pagan friends and neighbors. This was not a book written for seekers, it is not a worship service designed for those who have no interest in church.

Having said that, it is a letter written to a community in Rome. Think of what that means. Rome, the capital of the powerful Roman Empire, where these Christians lived in the midst of the shakers and movers of politics and society. It would be as if it were addressed to Christians living in Washington D.C. Romans has been used by theologians throughout time as they try to come to grips with culture and living out your faith in a culture that is not always sympathetic to a faith driven life. Augustine in his city of God in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century used Romans to understand God's presence in a Roman Empire which was coming apart at the seams and the church was trying to redefine its identity within

this reality. Luther and Calvin used Romans as a way to graciously structure the church and its polity. Modern theologians use Romans as a no to culture's prideful attempt of equating development with God's intentions. The grass roots movement of liberation theology found its home in Paul's letter to the Romans.

Romans provides a challenge and a message that is crucial to every generation and age. In this age as the society and the church is becoming more and more secularized we hear Paul's first verse that encourages us as Christians to be set apart, we are called to be saints.

We are called to be set apart. But Paul tells us that we are set apart for the Gospel of God. Many times we live as if we have been set apart from the Gospel of God. What is this Gospel, this good news? Verses 2-4 really give us the Gospel message in three short verses. Verse two tell us that the prophets foretold the coming of the Christ. Verse three tells us that this Christ was born of a woman, in the flesh along the royal lines of David that we read about earlier. This Christ was one of us, lived like us and then the next verse says he died like we will die, but he was resurrected. We are set apart to live our lives according to the life, death, resurrection of Jesus the Christ. We have been claimed and cleaned in the grace of God by the sacrifice of his son Jesus Christ. What does it mean to be set apart, called to be saints, it means to live our lives devoted to this man.

Finally Paul finishes his introduction in verse 6 with words that fit perfectly with what we need to hear. Paul states that we are called to belong to Jesus Christ. Notice he doesn't say that we are called to follow, but rather to belong, with Christ, be grafted into his body so that his will would be our will, his way our way, his peace our peace, his love our love. This is what it means when Paul states that we are to be set apart. The final verse Paul addresses the Romans again as those called to be saints.

When we think of who a saint may be we think of the pillars of the faith: Mother Theresa, Calvin, Billy Graham, Luther, and we think that we can't even compare. But in the Old Testament we hear very clearly as Samuel tries to identify the next king of Israel God speaking to him and saying: The Lord does not see as mortals see, they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

Our Christian life, our being set apart, our sainthood does not depend upon how much we do for others, it does not depend upon our attendance at church, in fact it is a reality now that once an obedient member of the church meant that they were obedient, set apart Christians. No longer, an obedient member of the church can also be someone

who has not set themselves apart from culture and has allowed themselves to join the church as another sign of joining the culture around them. Being a member of First Presbyterian Church does not guarantee a ticket to heaven, being engrafted and set apart with Christ does. What matters is the relationship that we have with Christ, what is on our hearts.

We are called to be saints, set apart by God because of the relationship that we have with our Savior. Those set apart, those who are abiding in Christ will find themselves in situations where their word will make a difference because it is a word from God. When Esther was called to be queen she didn't want to but she heard that maybe it was for such a time as this that we are called.

Maybe for such a time as this you were called to be a member of this church, to certain responsibilities in society, at work, at your home in order to make decisions based upon the Gospel of God, based upon the salvific power of our Savior Jesus Christ. Each of us is called to be a saint, we are called to avoid hypocrisy, we are called to end the dichotomy between our personal lives and our Christian lives. WE are called not to worry about what people think because it will not be those around you who will be judging you on judgment day, but rather our Father in heaven who knows and loves our heart. Amen.