"Blessed Are the Peacemakers", A Sermon preached by The Rev. Dr. C. Denise Yarbrough on the Feast of All Saints, November 1, 2026 at St. Mark's Episcopal Church Penn Yan, NY

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. (Matt. 5:9)

As we teeter on the brink of the contentious mid-term elections here in the US, the news has been full of election news from around the globe that is fraught with both joy and grief, hope and despair. In Serbia last weekend, Alexander Vucic, a right wing dictator was defeated by a student led opposition movement, and in Brazil, Flavio Bolsanaro was defeated by Luis Lula da Silva, a left wing opposition candidate. A colleague of mine, who is a Jewish rabbi in Rochester, a dual citizen of the US and Israel, joined 50,000 other diaspora Israeli citizens who flew back to Israel to vote in their momentous election on Tuesday. My colleague posted on Facebook that he was going back to Israel to vote for Peace. All over the world, people are speaking up and rising up to challenge leaders who have not governed in ways that promote peace, or justice or human rights and equality. People of faith of many different religions take their religious values into the voting booth because the religions of the world are in agreement that the heart of God is one that yearns for peace, justice and love in this world, not just in the world to come.

In this context we celebrate today one of our major feast days, All Saints Day. The feast of All Saints is an unusual feast day in our religious calendar. Unlike so many other major feasts, which celebrate some important event in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, the feast of All Saints is the one feast in which we celebrate the lives of human beings, famous and infamous, known and unknown, ancient and modern, close to us and far away. This is the feast day on which we honor history. The history that we have lived in our families, with our friends, through our ancestors, grandparents, parents, children. The history of our nation and of our faith tradition. The stuff of sainthood is the stuff of human life and we pause today to honor that life with all its accomplishments and failures. History is the story of all who have gone before us, who have shaped us and our world into what we know and experience today. All Saints is the way we try to preserve our historical memory in a liturgical way, so that we can learn from the past, from human wisdom and human folly as we walk our own path into an uncertain and at times, frightening future. We surround ourselves today with photographs of the personal saints we have known, making real and concrete the reality that our loved ones who have died are part of that communion of saints to which we too belong and that the lessons these beloved people taught us, the wisdom and experiences that they gave us were gifts from the living God to us that continue even as these saints partake of life on another shore.

All Saints Day is the one feast day of the year on which it is imperative to speak of politics and religion, two subjects that mainline Christians so often want to separate, despite the indisputable reality that the two are inextricably intertwined. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Jesus, is a God who works in and through history. As we live history, it is our religious and moral duty to look for God working in the historical events and social realities of the world in which we live. God entered human history in the form of Jesus of Nazareth to prove to us that God works through us **in** this world and that God calls us to

tune into God's will for this world, here and now. Our Christian faith is not merely a means to obtain a ticket into heaven when we die. It is God's way of calling us to help God to create heaven on earth while we live.

The beatitudes that Jesus recited to his disciples on that mountain were not a prescription for how to live. They were statements about the realities of God's kingdom. They give us snapshots of what the life of a saint in the kingdom looks like. Want to take a peek at the photos in the family album of saints who were peacemakers? Look at the wide variety of "saints" who have received the Nobel Peace Prize in the past 100 years. Those blessed saints of whom Jesus spoke come from all walks of life, working in politics, religion, science, social justice, the academy, in homes and schools and hospitals on all continents of the world.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." – Nelson Mandela and F.W. DeKlerk, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993 for their work to end apartheid in South Africa.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." - Mother Teresa, who worked among the poorest of the poor in Calcutta, renouncing all worldly wealth and comfort for herself to minister to Christ in the lives of the most forgotten people in the poorest of slums, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." – Archbishop Desmond Tutu, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his work for reconciliation between blacks and whites in South Africa.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy." - The 14th Dalai Lama, awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his non-violent resistance to persecution of the Tibetan people and his efforts to free Tibet from Chinese occupation without resorting to violence or armed conflict.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all manner of evil against you falsely on my account." – Martin Luther King, Jr., martyred for his efforts to win Civil Rights for African-Americans in this country during the 60s, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

When you look at those who have received the Nobel Peace Prize in its one hundred plus years of existence you see the whole panoply of possibilities for sainthood. From mystics like the Dalai Lama and Mother Teresa, to politicians and world leaders like Jimmy Carter and Mikhail Gorbachev, to Holocaust survivor and author/teacher Elie Weisel, to a young Pakistani girl fighting for the right for girls to be educated, having herself been shot by a Taliban gunman because she spoke out against that regime, Malala Yousafzai. Women and men involved in all kinds of struggles to better the human condition, to win justice, to secure peace, to assuage hunger, homelessness, hopelessness and poverty, to cure diseases. These are the saints of God and the peacemaking for which they were honored often came at a significant price – prison, martyrdom, poverty, danger,

persecution, a fatwa. Peacemaking, both in biblical times and in our most recent modern history, comes at a price and calls forth from us courage, mercy, kindness, a commitment to justice, restraint, hard work, tolerance and acceptance of those who are different.

We live in dangerous and violent times. While God does not call all of us to the extravagant works of justice, peacemaking and mercy that some of the more famous saints of recent history have done, each one of us is called to live our lives in such a way as to promote justice, peace, mercy, kindness and reconciliation in our neighborhood, our church and around the world. We cannot ignore the plight of those who are poor or hungry or homeless or oppressed, or in exile, whether those folks live down the street from us or in another country. When we emerged from the waters of baptism we were inducted into a community that puts love of God and love of neighbor before anything else, and we covenanted to work for justice and peace and to respect the dignity of every human being. Barbara Brown Taylor, noted preacher and theologian puts it well:

> *What makes a saint? Extravagance. Excessive love, flagrant mercy, radical affection, exorbitant charity, immoderate faith, intemperate hope, inordinate love. None of which is an achievement, a badge to be earned or a trophy to be sought; all are secondary by-products of the one thing that truly makes a saint, which is love of God, which is membership in the body of Christ, which is what all of us, living and dead, remembered and forgotten, great souls and small, have in common. Some of us may do more with that love than others and may find ourselves able to reflect it in a way that causes others to call us saints, but the title is one that has been given to us all by virtue of our baptisms. The moment we rose dripping from the holy water we joined the communion of saints, and we cannot go back any more than we can give back our names or the blood in our veins. (Weavings, Sept.-Oct. 1988, pp. 34-35.)*

On this All Saints Day we remember the saints from our own personal lives as well as those in the public arena who have shaped us as we've lived through our lifetimes. We are reminded that as we live out our days we too are leaving an imprint for the next generation - we are the saints our children and grandchildren will remember on November 1st each year, long after we are dead and buried. What will they remember about us? What world will we have left them? What will they have learned from us about peacemaking, justice and love of God and neighbor? How will our lives bear witness to the work of peacemaking? As we continue to celebrate this wonderful feast day, surrounded by the images of our departed saints, let us re-affirm our baptismal covenant together ever mindful of Jesus' description of life in the kingdom of God…"Blessed are the peacemakers…."

Amen.