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Trinity Episcopal Church
The Feast of All Saints –Sunday, November 1, 2026
Matthew 5:1-12

It's only in the past ten years or so that I've really paid attention to just how tribal we humans are. We proclaim the groups we identify with on our clothing, our shoes, our hats. Brand logos proliferate and we willingly agree to pay money to be walking advertisements. There is a whole employment marketplace on social media for folks who call themselves "brand ambassadors"! These groups, brands, products, hobbies, political parties, and organizations all comprise the mosaic of our public identity.

Until very recently, my family lived in the greater Washington DC suburbs of Northern Virginia, where it seemed that everyone primarily asserted their tribal affiliations on their cars. Nearly every vehicle was festooned with stickers of all sorts, claiming support of sporting teams, high schools, swim clubs, churches, universities, professional organizations, conspiracy theories, pet preferences, and political candidates. There was a sticker for just about everything one could imagine and plenty of folks who wanted to put them on their cars!

Of course, no reflection on our current culture's tribal nature is complete without recognizing what has happened to our political climate. Over the past few years, studies have consistently shown that we are more politically polarized now than perhaps ever before. Moreover, they have also found that those who had described themselves as conservative, now describe themselves as very conservative, and those who had described themselves as liberal, now describe themselves as very liberal. The moderate middle ground has all but disappeared… and our current election cycle puts this on full display.

All of this seems to be related to our propensity for tribal group identification. Historically, when we shared common national goals – and especially a common threat – there has been a coming together based on an understanding of who we are as citizens of a country – as Americans. But if we primarily see ourselves not as Americans, but as Liberal Americans or Conservative Americans, or whatever it may be, all the factors associated with in-groups and out-groups come into play. So, now our political opponent is no longer another American, albeit one with a different point of view, but rather is a part of some other entirely different group.

There are real-life consequences of all this. If we are friends with someone who has different political views, we may think that person's views are nuts, but that person is still our friend. But with political opponents, if someone is of a different political group, now that person is just one of those crazies of that other political party. They are quite literally "the other" and are somehow essentially different from us.

It seems it is human nature that when someone professes a belief or opinion different from ours, we tend to distance ourselves from that person because emotion is now involved. And since that emotion is potentially negative, we prefer to avoid the situation all together. So, the question is what do you do when someone expresses an opinion you disagree with and how can you keep the conversation going? This is a skill; not just a value or an idea, but a skill that needs to be practiced. And the best way to do this, experts say, "is to not treat people you disagree with as the other."

Well, that, my friends, is a theological statement, whether it was intended to be or not. The issue that sociological and political scholars identify is not merely a civic problem of increasing political polarization but also a deep and fundamental theological problem. And what they suggest is a moral and theological solution: to not treat people you disagree with as the other. To use churchy language, we would say that the solution is reconciliation – a coming together that ends our estrangement from each other and God. The Church teaches that we are called to be reconciled with God and each other, and as baptized members of the Body of Christ we are also called to be agents of this reconciliation in the world. This is our most important work.

Last Sunday, we heard Jesus distill the entirety of the holy Law to these two simple and yet endlessly challenging sentences: "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

(Matt 22:37-40) With this, Jesus frames love as the foundation upon which God's kingdom is built. This love of which Jesus speaks isn't an emotion; a feeling. This "love" is the hard labor of reconciliation, of bridge-building, of relationship, of communion. This love is the courageous work of reconciling ourselves to each other and God and, through that work, all of creation may be healed and transformed.

In the catechism found in our prayer book, one of the core responsibilities of all the baptized is "to carry on Christ's work of reconciliation in the world." As members of the Body of Christ, it is our responsibility to continue his work. As we more fully re-member Christ's body, we become ever more efficacious agents of transformation.

But it seems that we often get in our own way. Perhaps the ultimate question we need to ask ourselves is this: How do we identify ourselves? This question matters; this is very important. The late Cistercian monk Father Thomas Keating taught that our transformation in Christ is dependent upon our letting go of our over-identification with our groups and family; that they become obstacles to reconciliation by allowing us to objectify and distance those not in our group and avoid the hard work of relationship. Keating taught that we need to dismantle our over-identification with our groups and tribes because love is our true self – our true identity. All relationships with others, including God, need to be grounded in this foundational identity of love. And from this foundation, we may join with the saints in the building of God's Kingdom.

Thanks be to God, today we celebrate the Feast of All Saints, in which we rejoice in our membership in the communion of saints: that spiritual union of the members of Body of Christ. Doctrine teaches that we are all part of this mystical body and are joined in love and prayer with all the saints: past, present, and future. We are, quite literally, created for relationship and communion, not division and separateness. And through the waters of baptism, we are united as one body, one family. This is who we are before any other tribal affiliation or group identity. First and foremost, we are the beloved creatures of God and God makes his sun rise on us all, the righteous and the unrighteous; those we identify as part of our tribe and those we do not.

Simply put, I believe these distinctions that we make between ourselves are not made in God's eyes – only in our own. God beholds us all with the very same eyes of Love that first beheld the products of his creation at the beginning of time and judged it "very good." These same eyes of Love knows each one of us and judges us worthy of love and grace. And if we actually believe this truth that we are God's beloved, how can we do anything but live in full communion and relationship with God and each other?

In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus teaches his disciples with these words: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." (Matthew 5:7-9) On this Mount, Jesus proclaims that those who inhabit these attributes are blessed. But this blessedness is not the reward for acting in certain ways, but rather the natural result from when we live our principal identity of love and are reconciled and in communion with God and each other.

In order for us to be agents of reconciliation, we must strengthen the bonds of communion and love between each other, rather than put up false walls of difference that separate and estrange us. For there really is no such thing as "the other" – no them that is separate from us – because within the bonds of God's love such divisions simply cannot exist.

When we engage in the difficult work of relationship, we find that our fundamental communion puts to lie the felt experiences of division. When we are merciful, pure in heart, and reconciling makers of peace, we are blessed because, through these actions we reveal the truth of our deep union that lies beneath our seeming divisions. And when we see ourselves, each other, and the world around us through Christ's eyes, the holy eyes of unifying love rather than the discriminating eyes of tribal identification, we take up the mantle of our high calling and holy hope and join with Christ in his salvific work of reconciling all of creation to God.

Amen.