

1 Sermon, November 7, 2010

Texts: Ephesians 1:11-23, Hebrews 12:1-7

Title: "Shane Claiborne and the New Saints"

Today's sermon title is "Shane Claiborne and the New Saints." It sounds like a 70s pop group, Paul Revere and the Raiders, or "Tony Orlando and Dawn." But it's really something quite different.

If you were to meet Shane Claiborne, the first thing you'd probably notice is that he's tall and thin. *Really* thin. You'd notice his goatee, and how his braided blond hair is held back by a bandana. He wears an earring and very unattractive black-framed glasses. He's not there to impress you with his looks.

But if you were to talk to Shane Claiborne, you would find an amazing depth. This 35-year-old has been at the forefront of a movement called the "new monasticism," which is not about celibacy, but about living very simply, and living in community with others, and working with the poor.

Shane Claiborne is part of the Potter Street Community (formerly called The Simple Way) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He grew up middle class, but is now living in the middle of the ghetto. He spent ten weeks working with Mother Teresa before her death, and has written several books. He speaks to various groups about 100 times a year.

Why is he so popular? Because his honesty is refreshing. Many Christian speakers talk about how their life was a mess until they met Jesus, and now it's all together. Shane Claiborne says that his life *was* together before his conversion, but ever since he started paying attention to the words of Jesus, he has been challenged.

He really believes that Jesus wants us to be peacemakers, so he speaks out against war. He really believes that the first shall be last and the last first, so he dedicates his time to working with those who are least and last in society. He criticizes both political parties for always talking about the middle class, when the biggest challenge for us as a nation is how we treat the poor. He believes what Jesus said about coming for the sick, not the healthy, so who does he want to spend time with?

Now, we can't all be Shane Claibornes. In fact, I don't think it would be good if we *were* all Shane Claibornes.

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But we are connected. Claiborne, who grew up United Methodist, isn't a United Methodist anymore. But he is part of a long line of Christ-followers going all the way back to the apostles.

Like Francis of Assisi, Hildegarde of Bingen, Amma Syncletica of Egypt, Walter Rauschenbusch, Toyohiko Kagawa — Claiborne is someone who really tries to follow the teachings and example of Jesus.

Shane Claiborne, that weird-looking guy from Philadelphia, reminds us that there is a great variety of Christ-followers today. We also have a tremendous heritage in all the faithful people who have gone before us.

In fact, the book of Hebrews tells us that those faithful persons who have died are part of a great cheering section as we run the race of faith.

As we come to the table for Holy Communion today, there will be a "cloud of witnesses" with us. This cloud of witnesses is contained in part in our memories of people we have known who taught us the faith by word and example. The cloud of witnesses is present through the prayers that connect us to other Christians. We are connected because Christians around the world, and Christians across time have, in many languages, gathered around the table, doing it in memory of Christ.

We are connected by the desire to love God and do right. You have the desire to love God and do right, and so does Shane Claiborne. So did the people now deceased who set up our church's trust funds. So the desire to love God and do right connects us to the past and to the world.

We are connected by freedom in Christ. Ephesians talks about the "glorious blessings that will be yours together with all of God's people." Or in the NRSV: "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.

So we are connected to Grandma Ruth, and Uncle Lester, in the same way we are connected to Saint Peter the apostle and to Shane Claiborne. It's amazing. There is tremendous power in our faith together.

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Ephesians 1:11-23 (Contemporary English Version)

God always does what he plans, and that's why he appointed Christ to choose us. He did this so that we Jews would bring honor to him and be the first ones to have hope because of him. Christ also brought you the truth, which is the good news about how you can be saved. You put your faith in Christ and were given the promised Holy Spirit to show that you belong to God. The Spirit also makes us sure that we will be given what God has stored up for his people. Then we will be set free, and God will be honored and praised.

I have heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. So I never stop being grateful for you, as I mention you in my prayers. I ask the glorious Father and God of our Lord Jesus Christ to give you his Spirit. The Spirit will make you wise and let you understand what it means to know God. My prayer is that light will flood your hearts and that you will understand the hope that was given to you when God chose you. Then you will discover the glorious blessings that will be yours together with all of God's people.

I want you to know about the great and mighty power that God has for us followers. It is the same wonderful power he used when he raised Christ from death and let him sit at his right side in heaven. There Christ rules over all forces, authorities, powers, and rulers. He rules over all beings in this world and will rule in the future world as well. God has put all things under the power of Christ, and for the good of the church he has made him the head of everything. The church is Christ's body and is filled with Christ who completely fills everything.

Hebrews 12:1-7 (Contemporary English Version)

Such a large crowd of witnesses is all around us! So we must get rid of everything that slows us down, especially the sin that just won't let go. And we must be determined to run the race that is ahead of us. We must keep our eyes on Jesus, who leads us and makes our faith complete. He endured the shame of being nailed to a cross, because he knew that later on he would be glad he did. Now he is seated at the right side [α] of God's throne! So keep your mind on Jesus, who put up with many insults from sinners. Then you won't get discouraged and give up. None of you have yet been hurt in your battle against sin.

But you have forgotten that the Scriptures say to God's children, "When the Lord punishes you, don't make light of it, and when he corrects you, don't be discouraged. The Lord corrects the people he loves and disciplines those he calls his own."

Be patient when you are being corrected! This is how God treats his children. Don't all parents correct their children?