

Were you ever told, “Act your age!” when you were misbehaving? Maybe you were told to shape up, or something like that. But were you ever told to start acting like a saint? And then, the one who told you that, maybe it was a pastor, a teacher, or a parent, began to name off some of the great saints in the Bible, you know, giving you examples for you to imitate.

Maybe not. So, let's do that today. It is, after all, the Sunday that we observe All Saints' Day. So, I'll stand up here in the pulpit and say to you, but also to myself: It's time to start acting like a saint!

And, obviously, we have to ask, How does a saint act? We turn to the Bible, and we can zero in on Hebrews 11. Many of the great saints of the Old Testament are listed here. Saints like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, Moses of course. And we also see here Rahab, Samson, Samuel, and David. Saints, all of them.

So now we need to ask, Just how did these saints act? Well, they were people of faith. They lived by faith, and they died in faith. Yes, but how did they act?

You've read the book. You've heard their stories. And so, you know that Abraham, that great man of faith, failed to trust in the Lord while in Egypt, and he intentionally lied to the Pharaoh. He failed to trust in the Lord, also, when his wife Sarah gave her maidservant to him by which to have a child. And this same Sarah laughed at God's promise that she would have a son in her old age. You know about Isaac and Jacob that they played favorites with their children, and the results were devastating to their families. You heard that Moses killed an Egyptian and fled for his life, and that he intentionally disobeyed God in the wilderness and so was barred from stepping foot in the Promised Land. You've heard that Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho. That Samson was an immature man who was easily deceived. That Samuel was a terrible father. And that David sinned intentionally with Bathsheba and then had her husband put to death.

Start acting like a saint? Yes, but only in all their “virtuous and godly living” is how we prayed this morning. Yet, let me take that a step further. Start acting like saints also in their great and terrible sins. And they had some real doozies. Are you stunned? Should I repeat what I just said? It's time that you and I lived like the saints in all their ways, not just in their godly living, but also in their great sinfulness.

Do I have your attention? Good. Am I telling you to go out and intentionally lie? To start doubting God's promises? To go and commit adultery? Even murder? To be a terrible parent, and to intentionally disobey God? I don't need to tell you to do these things because every saint does them. If not with their bodies – eyes, tongues, hands, and so forth – as we see with the saints in the Old Testament, then within their hearts.

So, do not go out and commit adultery, but confess the truth that you and I have adultery within our hearts – the same adultery we see in David. Do not purposely lie and doubt God's promises, but admit that these sins live within us just as they did in the great saints of old.

What I'm saying is that we cannot be great saints unless we are great sinners. We do not need to go out and start sinning more boldly. We already do. But are we willing to admit this? Are you, or are you not, horrified by your sins? If you are not, then how are you a saint? Because if you are not horrified by them, you will think you are a saint because you are godly.

But no saint is a saint because of how they live. The white robes we see here in Revelation 7 are not clothing the saints because they were so godly, but because they were so sinful. And because they were horrified by their sins, they washed their filthy robes in the blood of the Lamb. That is how their robes became white. Not by the godliness of the saints; by the precious blood of Jesus Christ shed for them.

And that same blood was shed for you. And here it is for you on the altar. “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.” In that blood of Christ you are baptized. And as the Word of Absolution was declared to you this morning, that blood of Jesus covered you, covered all your sins.

There is a saint. The word *declared* that you just heard. God declares you to be His saints, and not because you sin less than others do. His declaration is founded in grace spoken to you in your baptism. And it has nothing to do with your godliness, but it has everything to do with Jesus Christ who lived, suffered, died, and rose again for you.

No saint boasts of his or her saintliness. Rather, saints know they are sinners, and they are horrified by their sins. Which is why they run to the cross of Jesus. They return to their baptism into Christ daily. They covet the Word of Absolution declaring them to be forgiven. And they desire, above anything else, the body and blood of their Lord in the Holy Sacrament.

You do not become a saint. You are declared a saint by your merciful God. It’s not the Law that makes us saints, therefore; it’s the Gospel. And this is why all the saints in Hebrews 11, every one of them, is clothed with a white robe in Revelation 7. The Law condemned them for their great sins, but they held by faith to the Gospel.

Do you hear what these saints are crying in our text? “*Salvation belongs to our God...and to the Lamb!*” It does not belong to them, but to God. Saints do not look to their own godliness for their salvation. They look to the Lamb, Jesus Christ. And these words are in the past tense in our text. It has been accomplished. It is finished! Salvation has been purchased for them by the blood of Jesus Christ.

To act like a saint is to cling to the Gospel, to cling to Jesus. But no one will cling to the Gospel unless they are first condemned by the Law; unless they are first horrified by their sins. And if this is you, here is the blood of the Lamb for you. This blood is your salvation, for it cleanses you of all sin. All of you are declared forgiven of your sins. Not just those of you who are saints. All of you! And if you doubt whether you are a saint, this promise is especially for you. It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. Even the most sick among you, the worst sinners here, are the very ones for whom Jesus shed His blood.

And so, act like a saint. Confessing your sins, believe that you are God’s saints, because you are the very ones for whom Christ died. Your sins, all of them, are forgiven. You have a gracious God. He forgives you not because you are so godly, not even because you will start to become godly. He forgives you because you are sinners, great sinners. And His forgiveness will change you. You will want to imitate the saints in all their virtuous and godly living.

You, my friend, are part of that great multitude in Revelation 7. You wear the same white robe of your baptism into Christ. And you cry with them, “*Salvation belongs to our God...and to the Lamb!*” Amen.