

Feast of All Saints Sunday, 11/6/2022, St. David's Episcopal Church (*Elizabeth Felicetti*)

So after an extra hour of sleep last night, as of today we start getting a little more light in the mornings. This year, however, I have been enjoying my dark morning walks. I can see the constellations when the sky isn't cloudy. Orion is my favorite. There are three little stars hanging down from his belt that are supposed to represent a sword, but lately on dark mornings I muse that to me they look like the ends of a cincture, the rope belt worn with church vestments. I love thinking of Orion not as a sword-wielding warrior but as a warrior in holy robes.

A couple weeks ago I mentioned in my personal monthly newsletter how much I love walking in the dark, and my dear preaching mentor David Schlafer sent me an email saying he wanted to make sure it was safe for me to walk in my neighborhood in the dark. I assure him that I always wear a reflective vest Gary gave me. I didn't tell him that Gary also gave me a headlamp I didn't wear, because I like the dark. But then last Wednesday morning, I stumbled as I rounded a corner and misjudged the distance between a yard and the street, causing a fall. I was listening to the Daily Office at the time, with the collect from last Sunday asking to grant that we could run without stumbling to obtain God's promises. Thursday morning, I reluctantly put on that headlamp and headed out with Pepper.

I immediately noticed that I could see my breath, which made me think of the Holy Spirit, long associated with breath. In Hebrew, the word *ruach* means both breath and spirit. Seeing one's breath on cool mornings isn't novel, but it looked different, somehow, lit up in the dark. It hit me differently. More spiritual or something.

And then as Pepper and I turned onto our street as we left the driveway, I noticed with my headlamp three pairs of bright green eyes. My first thought was that our next-door neighbors had put up some eerie glowing Halloween lights that I hadn't noticed before, but then I saw the outline of three large deer. I would not have seen those deer had I not been wearing that headlamp. They were perfectly still. I wondered how many mornings they had been in that exact place but I didn't notice, too caught up in looking at Orion's belt.

Since there were three of them of course I thought of the Trinity. Of God's presence, which is always there whether I see it or not.

I also thought of the Great Cloud of Witnesses from the letter to the Hebrews. On All Saints Sunday we remember all of those witnesses: people who have died, both so-called ordinary people in our lives as well as the various capital-S saints. They are all around us today, whether we see them or not. I'll soon be reading 27 names of some who died since last All Saints' Day, like Saint Joe Palsa and Saint Bill Isenberg, who often served as chalicers together up here. I loved seeing their reverence and joy as they served. Saint Ed Hines, who had a voice just like Burl Ives. Saint Anne Harrison, who got to see her youngest daughter married a few months before she died. Saint Jennie Lecakos, at last reunited with her husband Artie whom she never stopped missing since his death eleven years ago. Saint Steve Hudak, always cheerful and kind in times that others would have struggled with. Saint Dmitri Medvedev, who loved his sweet son Carter more than anything.

Other saints on the list this year or in our hearts who weren't members of our church, saints like my mother-in-law, Lucille, who like her son was stoic and generous and loving. Or my friend Diane Vie, whom I hadn't seen since a retreat we went on shortly before my final interview for this job as rector of St. David's. Diane set up a surprise Eucharist for our retreat of five women clergy, and she was so excited that she couldn't stop smiling.

We are surrounded by all of these saints this morning, and our baptisms can help us to see them a little more clearly. Baptisms shed light a little like that headlamp, I think. Darkness is beautiful, as anyone can see. The stars are beautiful. Sunset and sunrise are beautiful. But when we are baptized, maybe we can turn the light on and off just like a headlamp, so that sometimes we can see and remember those saints who are always there, just like I could see that trinity of deer on Thursday morning when I wasn't even looking for them.

Maybe the headlamps are not only baptism but what comes after. In the Episcopal church, baptism is not an end, but the beginning. Once baptized, we commit to continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers. Episcopalians interpret this as being part of a church community. Serving as Jesus' disciples together. When we gather week after week to hear the Word and consume the sacramental broken bread, we help each other to see the places where we might stumble. We light up the Way.

Today we are seeking saints. We are reading names out loud. We have pictures of some in the windows. And at any point during the service, but especially perhaps during the offertory or before and after communion, you are invited to light a candle in honor of a saint in your life. These candles will remind us all of the great cloud of witnesses who surround us this morning on this Feast of All the Saints.