



The Inheritance of the Saints

November 24th, 2019

All Saints' Episcopal Church, Atlanta

Rev. Dr. Simon Mainwaring

# The Inheritance of the Saints



Laying of Corner Stone of Eglesta Memorial Hall  
Sunday, June 24 - 11:17 - 10:40 a. m.  
Rev. W. W. Memminger, Rector & Suzanne Mezjick Memminger



## **The Collect**

Almighty and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things in your well-beloved Son, the King of kings and Lord of lords: Mercifully grant that the peoples of the earth, divided and enslaved by sin, may be freed and brought together under his most gracious rule; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## **The First Reading**     *Jeremiah 23:1-6*

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the Lord. Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the Lord.

## **The Epistle**     *Colossians 1:11-20*

May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-- all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.



## **Gospel**    *Luke 23:33-43*

When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. The people stood by, watching Jesus on the cross; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

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We meet here today, we sing, we pray, and we seek to love one another in the footsteps of so many saints. What an incredible inheritance we enjoy because of them. The tenacity, the persistence of vision, and the countless hours of service rendered to this church have all accumulated to offer you and I will the incredible privilege to imagine something that in the 119 years of this block has not been imagined before: an entire city block owned and shaped by All Saints' Episcopal Church, offered to God's glory, for the present and future vitality of this parish and for this city.



Just to make it crystal clear, no plans for the future of our block have yet been made, there is no blueprint for the future already decided upon, no wheels in motion and no drawings made. As much as I love the idea of a flotation tank in the courtyard to be used for vestry meetings, or the ingenious All Saints' All Snorts urban farm, goats and pigs on site to keep the staff company through the working week, none of those rumors are true. Our slate is clean, nothing yet is written upon it, for that is our work together next year, that we undertake with great joy and excitement and dare I say it, fun.

As we bring this year to a close of learning together about what other churches, social service agencies, educational and medical institutions, and business are doing with their bricks and mortar, next year's opportunity to dream invites us to lay a new foundation stone for future generations on this block. The prospect makes me think of one of my favorite images from Margaret Langford's wonderful history of All Saints' first hundred years. The image is of my predecessor, Willis Wilkinson Memminger, longest serving rector of All Saints' at 27 years, from 1910-1937, standing



with Suzanne Memminger, whom I presume was his daughter. Suzanne has a trowel in her hand, and Willis is looking a little worried about what she might do with it. They are there to lay the cornerstone of Egleston Memorial Hall, where today we house most of our staff offices and the library, but was built in part as a theater and was used for dances and performances not only for the parish but for the local Music Study Club and Drama League.

Memminger's exuberance saw All Saints' through the years of the Great Depression, from the First World War to just short of the outbreak of the Second. We think our own place in time is challenging, just imagine what our forbears in this church walked through together facing all of that, and by all accounts they did so with love and joy. Our inheritance of the saints, as the epistle to the Colossians puts it, is of those who laid foundations of hope trusting in God's grace and goodness. We are here today as a church because of them. What an incredible privilege it is to imagine that one day others will say the same of us.



As we look toward to next year's voyage of discovery and discernment for the future of our block, we might ask how it is that we will know where and for what we will lay our own foundation stone for the future mission of God in this place? Or put another way, what chapter will we author in our parish's history for this particular season in time?

Turns out that the emerging church in Colossae faced a similar challenge: of how to know the kind of future God called them to. As it stood, the ordering of life in that tiny town just a little inland from Ephesus on what is today the Turkish coast, was true to its wider context and the belief that the gods were all that separated them from the powers and forces that influenced their fate in the world. Accordingly, the fortunes of war would best be served, it was believed, by an appeal to Mars, and the hopes of love could be helped on their way by offering supplication to Aphrodite. Added to this was the political ordering of things in the world of the Emperor. All lived in subjection under the imperium of Rome; slave, free, male, female, each put in their place by birth and status.





What all of this added up to was a sense that a person's journey through the world was believed to be dominated by what was outside of them, on a crowded stage of actors - cosmological and political. For the average member of the Church in Colossae, life was an externally authored thing, determined beforehand, crafted by history, not one crafting it.

When the Letter to the Colossians, whose first chapter we heard verses from today, arrived in town and was read out loud to those first Jesus followers, it must have sent their heads spinning. Life was no longer to be ordered by engagement with the pantheon of gods, and neither was it to be ordered by Rome, but by Jesus. As Luke's gospel reminds us today in all of its Good Friday agony, in God's economy, the true order of things is revealed by the king who gives himself away to suffering and death. Christ is king, but not in power over against, but as servant, as last of all.



Christ the servant king is the foundation stone, and as such when we begin to construct our lives on Christ we trust that God has already been building in the midst of our lives, as individuals and as communities, in countless quiet and unseen ways. There is an extent, then, that the life that is built up in Christ is also one that digs down, an excavation of sorts that looks for the signs of the God who has been with us from the beginning.

For the Colossians, as with so many of the communities we come to know through the New Testament, the work of the Church was to tell these new people of God the story they had not known they were already part of, in Stanley Hauerwas's words, to become the Church as a 'storied people', worshipping a 'storied God'. And for us, if we are faithfully to write a new chapter for this church for the years ahead, we will first need to tell the story we have already been living in Christ. The beauty of that is there are storytellers all around you. My encouragement is that you might ask one another for the stories of the saints of God in this place. Learn what you can about what has happened in these buildings and on these grounds. Indeed, if I might be





forgiven in singling out one story-teller in particular, I would like to give thanks this morning for Ed Daugherty, who, given he has been caring for our landscaping since the middle of the last century, probably gets a pass.

Ed's story-telling for me included an image he had blown up of the original plans for this part of town, Peter's Park, after Richard Peters, in whose memory the land we stand on today was gifted to this church. Having taken me through the story of what would have otherwise been grand old homes and a cascading stream down the center of this block, Ed took me out to show me where the light rises and falls in the courtyard through the course of a year. Ed has seen the light rise and fall here for decades; and it was time to pass that knowledge of the light on to me.

That was what the Colossians were invited to do in order to follow Jesus: show one another the light that in Christ lay within. That is what we should do, as we become one another's story-tellers: to share with one another how Christ's light touches each of lives.



We don't author the future. We cannot know by our own merit or sheer good wits how and where we should lay our foundation stone for future generations. To imagine the future of our block truly is an act of discernment, for in the end the future belongs to God. Yet, we can join God in journeying there in Christ, confident that we will not build the Church in vain, because in truth it is Christ who has been building here for decades passed, and will build here for many more to come.

*'May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.'* What an incredible inheritance of the saints we enjoy in this place, among these people. May we walk toward our future with boldness and grace, trusting that the One who calls is indeed faithful, now and forever more. Amen.