Did you hear what we just sang?
Doctors and queens… shepherds and soldiers…
saints from every walk of life
And at the very end… every one of us sang it out loud
And I want to be one too!

Well… let's find out
How many saints do we have here today?
Go ahead… raise your hand if you're a saint

Mmm hmm
I see a few brave ones
And I see a lot of you looking at your neighbors…

Most of us don't think of ourselves as saints
When we hear that word… we think of stained glass
Halos… lions… martyrs
Saint Francis with the birds on his shoulders
Mother Teresa in the streets of Calcutta
People who never lost their temper in traffic
People who never said anything they had to take back

But our hymn… knows better
It says you can bump into a saint just about anywhere
At school… at the store… on the bus… ***even here… in church***
Because the saints of God…
look a lot like the people sitting next to you

In the New Testament… Paul wrote letters…
to the saints in Corinth…
To the saints in Ephesus…
To the saints in Philippi
And guess what… the saints in Corinth ***were a mess!***

They were fighting… suing each other… getting drunk…
*And Paul… **still called them saints!***

Listen up… cause this is important…
A saint… is ***not*** somebody… who ***got everything right!***
A saint… is somebody… ***who belongs to God***
And that's every one of you…
So let's try that again
Raise your hand if you belong to God

There it is
We're in ***a room full*** *of saints!*

Our first reading this morning comes from the Book of Revelation
Now… some of you get nervous when we read Revelation
You think… dragons… beasts… the end of the world
People on street corners with megaphones and predictions
Repent! The end is near!

But before you start spinning out… ***listen to who wrote it.***
John was an old man… on a little island called Patmos
He was banished to that desolate rock…
To live out the rest of his life in exile… Isolation
Why?
For preaching the ***Good News***… telling people ***about Jesus.***

His friends… the other apostles… were scattered
Many had been killed… Violently. Brutally.
The young church was small… scared… under tremendous pressure

And in the middle of all that… ***God gives John a vision***
Not of how ***bad*** things are
But of ***how everything turns out***

After this I looked… and there was a great multitude…
that no one could count
from every nation… from all tribes and peoples and languages
standing before the throne… and before the Lamb

Every nation. Every tribe. Every language.

Now… All y'all… know something ***about that***
Look around
People from Jamaica… Trinidad… Barbados… Guyana… Haiti
Others from New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts,
Even Great Britain… Europe…
And *others…* born right here ***in Florida***

Some of you said your first prayers in Creole
Some in Spanish… some in Hindi
Some of you said them in *authentic… Elizabethan… English*
Right out of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

Our multicultural community…
is a little rehearsal… A preview…
Of that great multitude around the throne

And look at what they're doing
They're not sitting quietly… hands folded…
They're waving… ***palm branches***
They're shouting… ***Salvation belongs to our God!***
The angels *fall on their faces…* ***and sing***
Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor…

That's not sadness… loneliness… desperation..
That *is a celebration!*
That's church!

One of the elders turned to John and asked
Who are these… robed in white… and where have they come from?
Having no real clue… John answered…
Sir… you're the one who knows!

I love that!
John didn't ***pretend to know the answer***
So the elder told him…
These are they… who have come out of… the great ordeal…

Did you get that?
The saints… ***are not*** people *who never suffered*
They are the ones ***who came through it***
Through sickness… Through poverty…
Leaving home… Starting over *in a strange country*
They came through hurricanes… and layoffs…
losing the people they loved…
They *came out* of the great ordeal.

And they didn't come out of it because they were strong
They came out of it… because the Lamb carried them
They washed their robes… in the blood of the Lamb
Their robes are white… not because they were never dirty
But because Somebody washed them… for all for us.

And look at the promise
We will hunger no more… and thirst no more
The sun will not strike… nor scorching heat
Everyone in this room knows scorching heat!
The Lamb will be our shepherd
He will guide us to springs of the water of life
And God… will wipe away every tear from our eyes

Not some tears
Every tear

[IMAGE: A hillside by the Sea of Galilee, crowds gathering]

Now in our Gospel this morning… Jesus goes up on a mountain
And he sits down… the way rabbis still sit down to teach
And when Jesus finally opens his mouth… His ***first*** word is…
Blessed

Blessed are the poor in spirit
Blessed are those who mourn
Blessed are the meek
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
Blessed are the merciful
Blessed are the pure in heart
Blessed are the peacemakers
Blessed are those who are persecuted

Now that is an upside-down list
If you or I made a list of who's blessed…
it would look a little different
Blessed are the rich
Blessed are the healthy
Blessed are the ones with the big house and the nice car
and the kids who call every Sunday

But Jesus looks out at that crowd on the hillside
Fishermen… farmers… widows… sick folks… nobodies
And he says… ***you…***

<u>You</u> are the blessed ones

The word in Greek is makarios
It means happy… but it's much deeper than happy
It means… ***God's favor is resting on you***
It means… ***you are going to be all right***

Notice… *This is* ***not*** *a* ***to-do list***
Jesus doesn't say… Go out and mourn so you can get blessed
He's not handing out assignments
He's telling them what God already sees when God looks at them

Blessed are those who mourn… for they will be comforted

That's the same promise we heard in Revelation
God will wipe away every tear
Jesus starts the promise on the mountain…
and John sees it finished… at the throne

And then our epistle from First John puts it all together
See what love the Father has given us…
that we should be called children of God
And that is what we are!

Not… that is what we might be someday
Not… that is what we'll be if we behave
That is what we are
Right now
Beloved… we are God's children now

And what we will be… has not yet been revealed
We don't know all of it yet
But we know this… when he is revealed… we will be like him
For we will see him as he is

So we are saints… now
And we are becoming saints… still
Both at the same time
God is not finished with any of us

Now some of you have heard me say this before
I've said it at every funeral since the day I was ordained

When we come to this altar rail for communion…
we kneel together… side by side
Horizontally
Shoulder to shoulder

And when someone we love dies…
they're not gone from this feast
They're just at the head of the table

They're still here
They're still at the meal
But now they participate… vertically
They kneel with us… from the other side

That's what the church means when we say in the Creed…
I believe in the communion of saints
It's not a nice idea
It's a dinner party
And the table is a lot longer than this building

So when you come up to this rail today…
I want you to remember who's kneeling with you
Your mother… your grandfather… your friend from back home
The folks who used to sit in that pew right over there
They're not gone from this feast

They're at the head of the table
And they are singing… Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving!

Now… there's another way the saints are still with us
And you can see it… if you walk around this church

This week… take a minute after the service
Walk slowly around this building
Read the plaques on the walls
Look beside the windows
Look at the ends of the pews
Walk around the altar… wear your glasses…
You'll find names.

People we've never met
Most of us can't tell you a single thing about them
What they did for a living
What they laughed at
What hymn they liked to sing

But we know one thing
They gave

They gave so that a congregation they would never meet… could have a place to pray
They gave to people who weren't born yet
They gave to you

Think about everything that has happened in this room
The babies baptized at that font
The couples who said I do at this rail
The Easter mornings… The Christmases…
And the hardest goodbyes
The days we carried someone we loved up this aisle
and didn't know how we'd make it through

This room holds us
In good times… and bad times
And it's still holding us

And it's holding us… because somebody came before us
and decided… this place is precious
They built a place like no other… anywhere
And they left it to us. They entrusted it… to us… for our season here.

That's legacy

And that leaves every one of us with a question
How will you be remembered?

Not… how big was your house
Not… what kind of car did you drive
Somebody… someday… is going to sit in that pew
A child who isn't born yet
A family who hasn't moved to Port St. Lucie yet
They're going to come in out of their own personal storm…
and sit down in a place that was built to hold… in God's Love.

And they're going to wonder…
Who cared enough… to make room for me?

Now here's the thing about giving that nobody tells you
The giver always walks away happier than the receiver

You know it's true
Think about the last time you gave somebody a gift…
and you couldn't wait for them to open it
You were more excited than they were!
Watch a little child hand you a drawing she made just for you
Who's smiling bigger?
Watch a grandmother slip a folded bill into her grandson's pocket
and say… don't tell your mother
She's the one walking away glowing

In the Book of Acts… Paul tells the elders at Ephesus
to remember the words of the Lord Jesus…
who said… It is more blessed to give than to receive

More blessed
Deeply blessed
Completely blessed
Blessed are you… ***the givers***

Generosity is not just something we do
It is a ***sacred*** action.
It is the ***Holy Spirit***… alive in our human hearts
It's the fingerprint of God gently placed on the very core of our being

And I'll tell you something else I've learned
An open heart can't keep a closed wallet
When God opens your heart… your hand opens too
They go together
You can't have one without the other

Over the next few weeks… you're going to receive a pledge card
I'm not going to tell you what to write on it
That's between you and God

But I am going to ask you to do something
Take it home
Put it on the kitchen table
And pray over it

Pray over it like one of the saints
Pray over it like you always wanted to… but were too afraid to try
Pray over it like someone who knows scarcity…
And is finally learning to trust…
That God will provide
For those who seek the Lord… lack for nothing… that is good

And then bring it here… on the Sunday ***before*** Thanksgiving
An in-gathering of the Saints of God…
Overflowing with abundance… brimming with Love
And give thanks together… like we've never done before
Like the Saints… God has claimed as his own.
All of you… and me.

The Psalm we prayed this morning …
Taste and see that the Lord is good
Happy are they who trust in him

Taste and see
In a few minutes… we're going to do exactly that
We're going to come to this table
And we're going to taste the goodness of God
in bread and wine

And we won't come alone
We'll kneel shoulder to shoulder with each other
And we'll kneel with that great multitude no one can count
From every nation… every tribe… every language
Robed in white
Waving palm branches
Washed clean by the Lamb

The ones whose names are on our walls
The ones whose names are in our hearts
And one day… the ones who will read our names
and wonder who we were

So let's give them something to remember

Remember what we sang at the start?
You can meet them in school, on the street, in the store,
in church, by the sea, in the house next door,
they are saints of God whether rich or poor,
and I mean to be one too.

Raise your hand one more time
If you belong to God

There it is

My Saints…

Amen