

Psalm 24

Not Just a List

A sermon preached by
James F. McIntire

Text:
Psalm 24

November 1, 2009
All Saints Sunday

¹The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it,
the world, and those who live in it;
²for he has founded it on the seas,
and established it on the rivers.
³Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
⁴Those who have clean hands and pure hearts,
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.
⁵They will receive blessing from the LORD,
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
⁶Such is the company of those who seek him,
who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah
⁷Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors!
That the King of glory may come in.
⁸Who is the King of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle.
⁹Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors!
That the King of glory may come in.
¹⁰Who is this King of glory?
The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah

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Today we celebrate All Saints Sunday as we remember those who have gone before us in faith ... those who have nourished and nurtured us .. those who have taught us and led us .. those who have reminded us what it means to be followers of Jesus.

As we read the list of names of members, friends and family who have died this past year, I am reminded that it's not just a list. It's memories and joys and tears and laughter, it's that great cloud of witnesses that Paul tells us about, it's the re-naming of our loved ones and the remembering of the body of Christ that we call the Church.

It's not just a list. And these stories by one of today's greatest preachers and teachers of preaching, Rev. Fred Craddock, reaffirm that point for me. They are taken from a collection of his stories, *Craddock Stories* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001) and I share them with you to celebrate All Saints Sunday.

It's not just a list.



Stories by Fred B. Craddock

Last December I was summoned to Superior Court, DeKalb County, Georgia, to serve on the jury. On Monday morning at 9:00, 240 of us formed the pool out of which the juries for civil and criminal cases would be chosen. The deputy clerk with the Superior Court stood and called the roll. Two hundred and forty names. She did not have them in alphabetical order; you had to listen.

And while I was waiting, I began to listen. There were two Bill Johnsons, one was black and one was white, and they were both Bill Johnson. There was a man named Clark, a Mr. Clark, who answered when the clerk read, "Mrs. Clark."

He said, "Here."

She looked up and said, "Mrs. Clark."

And he said, "Here."

She said, "Mrs. Clark."

And he stood up and said. "Well, I thought the letter was for me, and I opened it"

She said. "We summoned *Mrs.* Clark."

"Well. I'm here. Can't I do it? She doesn't have any interest in this sort of thing."

And the clerk said, "Mr. Clark, how do you know? She doesn't even know she's been summoned."

This roll call is pretty good. There was a man there whose name I wrote down phonetically because I couldn't spell it. His name was Zerfeld Leischenstein. Zerfeld Leischenstein. I remember it because they went over it five or six times, mispronouncing it. He insisted it be pronounced correctly, and finally stood in a huff and said, "I see no reason why I should serve on a jury in a court that can't pronounce my name."

The woman next to me said, "Leischenstein? I wonder if he's a Jew?"

I said, "Well, I don't know. Could be. Does it matter?"

She said, "I am German. My name is Zoeller."

And I said, "Well, it doesn't matter, that was forty years ago."

"He and I could be seated next to each other in a jury."

I said, "Well, you were probably just a child when all of that happened

And she said, "I was ten years old. I visited Grandmother. She lived about four miles from Buchenwald, and I smelled the odor." Calling the roll.



When my wife and I finished our service at the student church when I was in seminary, our last Sunday there they gave us a gift. It was a quilt some of the women of the church had made, and they stitched into the top of the quilt the names of all the church members. Every time we moved and we'd come across that quilt, we'd spread it out on the bed, and we'd start remembering. We'd remember something about everyone.

"There's Chester, who voted against and persuaded the others to vote against my raise. There's Mary and John, who put new tires on our car. There's Lloyd, very quiet, never said anything. There is his wife Marie. There is that marvelous woman Lois who lived with that man who drank and became violent, yet she was always faithful and pleasant, and he was dying with cancer when we went. My first funeral there, you remember."

And this is the way we go over the quilt. Don't call it a list.



I remember when they brought the famous list to Atlanta. The workers set it up in the public place— block after block to form a long wall of names, Vietnam names. Some of us looked at it like it was a list of names; others went over closer. Some walked slowly down the columns. There was a woman who went up and put her finger on a name, and she held a child up and put the child's hand on the name. There was a woman there who kissed the wall at a name. There were flowers lying beneath the wall.

Don't call it a list. It's not a list.



Before I married and served in the little mission in the Appalachians, I moved down to a place on Watts Bar Lake, between Chattanooga and Knoxville, a little village. It was the custom in that church at Easter to have a baptismal service. My church immerses, and it was held, this baptismal service, in Watts Bar Lake on Easter evening at sundown. Now out on the sandbar, I, with the candidates for baptism, moved into the water, and then they moved across to the shore where the little congregation was gathered, singing around a fire and cooking supper. They had constructed little booths for changing clothes with hanging blankets. As the candidates moved from the water, they went in and changed clothes and went to the fire in the center. Finally, last of all, I went over, changed clothes, and went to the fire.

Once we were all around the fire, this was the ritual of that tradition. Glenn Hickey, always Glenn, introduced the new people, gave their names, where they lived, and their work. Then the rest of us formed a circle around them, while they stayed warm at the fire. The ritual was that each person in the circle then gave her or his name, and said this,

"My name is..., and if you ever need somebody to do washing and ironing ..."

"My name is...If you ever need anybody to chop wood..."

"My name is...If you ever need anybody to baby-sit..."

"My name is...If you ever need anybody to repair your house... "

"My name is...If you ever need anybody to sit with the sick... "

"My name is..., and if you ever need a car to go to town..."

and around the circle.

Then we ate, and we had a square dance. And then at a time they knew, I didn't know, Percy Miller, with thumbs in his bibbed overalls, would stand up and say, "Time to go," and everybody left.

He lingered behind and, with his big shoe, kicked sand over the dying fire. And my first experience of that, he saw me standing there still, and he looked at me and said, "Craddock, folks don't ever get any closer than this."

In that little community, they have a name for that. I've heard it in other communities too. In that community, their name for that is "church." They call that "church."



Do you have a piece of paper? Do you have a piece...? Well, use your worship bulletin. Would you write in the margin somewhere or at the bottom these words: *I thank my God for all my remembrance of you.* I thank my God for all my remembrance of you. And write a name. You choose the name. You remember the name. Write another name, and another name, and another name.

Have you written any names? Do you have a name or two? Keep the list. Keep the list, because to you, it's not a list. In fact, the next time you move, keep that list. Even if you have to leave your car, and your library, and your furniture, and your typewriter, and everything else, keep that with you.

In fact, when your ministry has ended and you leave the earth, take it with you. I know, I know, I know. When you get to the gate, St. Peter's going to say, "Now look, you went into the world with nothing, you've got to come out of it with nothing. Now what've you got?"

And you'll say, "Well, it's just some names;"

"Well, let me see it."

"Well, now, it's just some names of folks I worked with and folks who helped me."

"Well, let me see it."

"This is just a group of people that, if it weren't for them, I'd have never made it."

He'll say. "I want to see it."

And you'll give it to him, and he'll smile and say, "I know all of them. In fact, on my way here to the gate I passed a group. They were painting a great big sign to hang over the street. And it said, 'Welcome Home.'"



It's not just a list.

Amen.