

All Saints' Celebration: OBSCURE SAINTS

1 John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12 [MW20-40]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Kaiwaka and Wellsford, Sunday 01 November 2020

(After "Obscure Saints Quiz")

There are certainly some obscure saints!

- had you ever heard of St Guy of Anderlecht?
patron saint of horned animals
- or St Ulric?
who is supposed to help you keep moles out of the garden
- or even St Lydwina of Scheidam?
who helps protect ice-skaters from injury
- me neither!!

Today we are celebrating All Saints' Day – and those are all saints!

- for me this day has always been an opportunity to remember saints
who did not make it into our Church Calendar
- to remember saints who are obscure
not just because they are patron saints of horned animals, skaters,
gardens free of moles, or people with stiff necks ...
- they are "obscure" because they followed Jesus faithfully, touched people's lives
and just got on and did what they were supposed to do
- and no one wrote about them, they didn't make a fuss or make the headlines
they are not in any book of saints

However these saints, these obscure 'obscure saints' are very important

- they were noticed by someone
without them the world would be a poorer place and heaven emptier

This morning I would like to share with you one such saint

- someone did write about her, though not for inclusion in any church calendar
this is a person remembered and appreciated
who stands for many, many saints whose day, All Saints'
ALL Saints', we mark today

My grateful thanks to Philip Gulley

- who remembered and recorded this in honour of all saints
in his book *For Everything a Season*

The best luck I've had lately is moving next door to Libby Eddy. When we first looked at our house, the realtor gave us a computer printout detailing its virtues. It listed three fireplaces, a dining room, a living room, a basement, three and a half baths, four bedrooms, a two-car garage, and a cool breezeway for summer naps. But not one word about Libby Eddy. At the bottom of the page, where they name the extras, it read *Stove, dishwasher, and window treatments stay*. But no sentence saying, *Kind woman next door will love your family and dispense sound advice, but only when asked*. The best things about a house seldom get mentioned on the computer printout the realtor gives you.

This is a new neighbourhood of young families finding their way. Libby and her husband built their house in October 1955; thirty-five years later a developer built a horseshoe of houses around Libby. She is our centre, our anchor, our resident sage. In every neighbourhood I have lived, there has been one wise person whose life radiates good sense and solid virtue.

We young people move in, flush with pride and full of ourselves, snickering at these old-fashioned people, but within a year we are knocking on their doors asking advice.

Back when people didn't move far from home, they turned to their parents and grandparents for counsel. Today, with families sprawled across the nation, there is no one to talk to and we make terrible decisions. How can we ask Grandma's advice over a plate of cookies if Grandma's a thousand miles away in her Florida condo? All that wisdom gone to waste. I blame every social ill on this sad fact of modern life.

Libby Eddy is a retired horticulturist. We wander over to her house to ask what kind of trees we should plant and end up asking her counsel on matters of child rearing, investing, and who to hire to paint our house. She is a big believer in hard maples and blue spruces, in rearing children with clear expectations and much affection, in blue-chip stocks, and in Larry Hart, the painter.

There is a man in our town who, ten years ago, sold his house and journeyed to California to meet a New Age guru and unlock the mysteries of the universe. He came back three months later, flat broke and none the wiser. Libby would have talked to him for free.

Joan comes home and tells me, "I hope when I'm Libby's age, I'm just like her." I hope I'm around to see that. Libby's husband isn't. He died in 1993. I think of all the grief Libby has shouldered since then and marvel at her strength. But then strength doesn't come through ease and comfort and smooth sailing.

I'm planning to landscape my backyard. Libby told me about farmers down the road who stack fieldstone at the corners of their fields, free for the taking. She told me the best place to buy topsoil and shrubs and trees and when to plant them.

"Try a black maple tree," she said. "They're a wonderful tree."

I went to the nursery and asked a young man, fresh from college, if they had any black maple trees. He laughed and said there was no such tree. An old man in bib overalls, a nursery worker standing nearby, interrupted. "Oh, yes, there is. They're a wonderful tree, but no one asks for them anymore. Where'd you learn about black maple trees?"

I drew myself up and said that anyone who knows anything about trees knows about black maple trees. I looked at the young man as I spoke, the young whippersnapper.

I intend to spend quite a few winter afternoons at Libby's house planning out my landscaping. She has pictures and books and various other horticultural materials to show me. We've cleared our calendars and are going to work.

I could have lived anywhere in the world. I had the good fortune to move next door to Libby Eddy. When I lie in bed at night, the light outside her barn spills through our window and bathes the room, light amidst the darkness.

Jesus commands us to love our neighbours. Such an easy thing to do, when you live next door to a saint like Libby Eddy.

I invite you to take a moment to recall the 'Libby Eddys' who have touched your life

- recall someone or the someones who have had a huge impact on how or why you do things
- on the way you think, the road you follow, the choices you make
- these are the saints who pointed you in the right direction who set you on the path of life as a follower of Jesus

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*Loving God,
on this day, All Saints' day
we do indeed pause to remember and give thanks
for all your saints ...*

*... some we have heard of, some we have met, many are unknown to us ...
... they are all your saints.*

*Thank you for their example and inspiration.
May they enjoy their well-earned reward.
May they cheer us on,
so that we too may be examples and inspiration,
saints of your Kingdom.*

*We pray in the name of Jesus,
Amen.*