

“FACEBOOK”

Scripture lesson: Hebrews 12:1-2 – *All Saints Day*

Dr. Andrew Wolfe, Trinity United Methodist Church

Homewood, AL – November 6, 2011

Well, I have a Facebook page now. A friend last week, sent me a message on my page to say that it was kind of scary to think I was into Social Media on the Internet. As the staff will tell you, I am technically challenged. It took me a while to learn e-mail, and about the time I had that down, along came text messaging and twitter – which I still haven’t figured out. For a while, they have been telling me that if I was going to be a hip, with-it pastor and stay in touch with the younger generation, then I needed a Facebook page.

So, with some help, I set one up. You probably know how it works. You enter some information about yourself – whatever you want people to know. There is a place to post some pictures. There is a screen to search for people you know. If they have a Facebook page, you can send them a “friend request” and vice versa people can request to be your “friend.” There is a confirm button you hit, then you have access to each other’s information. Facebook also has a “wall” on which you can post and read what friends are doing. At last count, I have 246 friends....which is nice to know.

Facebook has allowed me to locate old friends I haven’t heard from in years. One of my good friends from high school sent me a friend request and we re-connected. It had been 25 years. I located Reinhart who was my flat mate in Scotland. A college friend has started a group for people who were in school together. It has been fun hearing what people have been doing for the last 30 years. Looking at their pictures, they have all gotten so old!

Facebook has been a pleasant surprise for me. It has reconnected me to people who have been a part of my journey in life. I have been reminded how many people have had a part to play in making me who I am. I have discovered a sense of comfort in this connectedness. It has placed some ground under my feet on which I now stand. All this is something that we sorely need.

Wyatt Cooper, in his book, *Families*, says that we are trying to learn to live today without the roots which in the past have afforded us stability and a sense of permanence in life. *Many children*, he writes, *can’t even tell you the name of their grandparents.*

A couple of years ago, bestselling author Donald Miller, spoke here at Trinity. His book, *Blue Like Jazz*, which is being made into a movie, tells of his spiritual journey. Miller has another book called, *Father Fiction*. With sometimes brutal honesty and with humor, Miller talks about what it’s like to grow up without a father. He writes:

I learned to tie a tie when I was 12. The guy at the big-and-tall store taught me. We stood between the racks of oversized shirts and sport coats, so big that you could use them to cover a jet ski in the winter. We stood there, as my mother watched, and I learned the little end goes back through the opening. I could tell you a thousand stories just like that, about guys teaching me things my father should have taught me.

Having grown up without *my* father present in my life, I know exactly what Miller is talking about. That lack of connectedness.

Commenting on a fatherless boy who had been arrested for murder in his town, Miller said that *it is amazing how different we become when there is someone in our lives who might be ashamed of us, somebody who also provides food, a roof and love*. Without that connection, children are left to try to piece life together on their own. Maybe this is why Facebook has become so popular. So many people are looking for that connectedness that is missing in their lives.

Wyatt Cooper remembers his own childhood when they would go to family reunions and listen to the stories of the relatives who had preceded him. Those stories helped to locate him in life. They provided him with a past and a sense of community.

He tells of going out into the old family cemetery one day. They stood there amid the fallen tombstones, spinning yarns. He writes of that experience:

A child could stand, as I stood, with his bare feet digging into the sand of their graves, and know that their toil and their despair, their trials and their triumphs were forever a part of him.... I could see that the world did not begin with me. I could see that I was a part of all that went before, and they are forever a part of what I am...and what I shall be. It is important for a child to know that the world does not begin or end with him, and in between his being born and his dying, he has a link to forge. He has a challenge, a chance, a responsibility.

That's why the Church celebrates this day. The Letter to the Hebrews was written in a time not unlike ours. It was a time of dislocation and crisis. Chapter 12 begins with this powerful statement of connectedness: *Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus who is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith*.

This is All Saint's Day. On this day, the church takes some time to go poking around in the cemetery to "read the tombstones." To remember that great cloud of witnesses. To spin our yarns and tell the stories of all those faithful people who have gone before us. Stories of impetuous Peter who loved Christ so deeply. And of Paul who risked everything for him. We spin our yarns of martyrs who refused to call any Lord save Christ. Of Martin Luther, the thundering reformer, and John Wesley, preacher to the lost and poor. We also tell the story of Mrs. Smith who taught us second grade Sunday school, and the Jones who suffered through our adolescent years as counselors in our youth group. We remember mothers who nurtured us, fathers who provided for us, friends who stood beside us, prophets who spoke hard truth to us.

We don't do this out of some morbid curiosity. We gather to dig our feet in the earth of their graves so that we will know that their trials and triumphs are a part of us. This day helps to locate us. And give us resolute courage to live faithfully as they did.

Despite what we sometimes think and feel, we are not alone in life. We are a part of this living stream of people whose lives have touched ours, and in that touch have helped to shape us. Some of those people are still around, some have died. Some of their names we know, but many more are people we never met, but their lives have made ours possible. They are all there on our Facebook page, waiting to befriend us, to share their lives with us, to become a part of our journey.

So today, I invite you to remember who is on your Facebook page. Who are those people who have befriended you in life, and been a part of your journey? Who is in that great cloud of witnesses in your life?

There is a country western song called, *The Breath You Take*, which goes:

He looks up from second base, dad's up in the stands.
He saw the hit, the run, the slide, there ain't no bigger fan.
In the parking lot after the game, he said,
"Dad I thought you had a plane to catch."
He smiled and said "Yeah, son I did."

Knowing that there is someone up there in the stands cheering us on, gives us courage and joy.

And it reminds us that we too are called to "forge a link" between those who have gone before us and those who will come after us. All of our lives witness to something. The challenge is to ensure that the witness we bear becomes a source of hope for others. We have the opportunity, and the responsibility, to become a friend to others, to be a part of the communion of saints.

I think, if God had a Facebook page, we would all be on it. God wants to befriend *all* of us. He invites and waits for us to confirm that friendship, so that he can become our head cheerleader, our comforter in times of trouble, our encourager in times of distress, our counselor in times of confusion...our "go-to" man.

In the days before Facebook, we used to sing, *What a Friend we have in Jesus*. We are on his "friends" page! We always have been and always will be!