* Philippians 3: 10-14
* Thanks for opportunity to be here
* We will talk a bit about saints, sainthood, saintly behavior today
* We all have precious memories of our own personal saints
  + Relatives, dear friends, church members who came before us, who taught us, and loved us
  + Here in a bit we will recognized those saints we lost during the past 12 months
* Some of our saints have been gone much longer in a physical sense
* But continue to live here
* And in heaven
* But for a bit, let’s look at official sainthood
* As far as I know, only the Roman Catholic church has a formal process for identifying and canonizing saints
* Roman Catholic recognizes over 10,000 named saints
* Might sound like a lot, but 10,000 in the entire history of the church is not a high number
* For the first few hundred years of the church, saints were selected by popular proclamation
* At about the year 1000, the process became more formal
* In 1983, Pope John Paul II made sweeping changes to the process
* Misconception to protestants is how saints are invoked in prayer
  + Don’t pray TO a saint, pray WITH a saint
  + This theology rings with me, pray with
* I was curious so I looked,
* From the A to Z of sainthood,
  + 1 Saint Aaron, no not for hitting home runs, but from Britain
  + 1 Saint Zygmunt from the Ukraine. He was canonized by Pope Benedict in 2005
* found 9 different St David’s
* No, I don’t add to the list
* No St Carol
* 1 Saint Harold
* 2 Saint Alan’s
* 1 Saint Suzanne
* Looking at politics, found 10 different Saint Hilary, 3 Saint Benjamin, 1 Saint Donald
* Here is an image of the medal created for St Teresa of Calcutta
* We know her as Mother Teresa, she was canonized a few years ago
* What is at opposite end of the continuum? At the bottom
* Turn to NFL, New Orleans Saints won SB 44 over Colts
* But before that squad, Saints suffered badly, very badly
* Fans stopped coming to the games, or if they sarcastically wore bag over their heads to hide identity, in shame
* And team was known as the Aints, like this
* Imagine a line rising up to the saints
* So we know we have those who are saintly and sadly, there are those who are decidedly anti-saintly (next slide)
* Where do we fall on this continuum?
* I suggest like Paul wrote to the Philippians, we press on towards the victory, toward perfection
* Today, We fall in between the Aints and the Saints
* But in keeping with the rhyming, what are we called?
* Quaints?
* No, we’re not a pretty cottage on Cape Cod, so no, not the quaints
* How about the Paints
* Guess we’re not a type of horse
* Not oil or latex based wall coverings
* Not shellac
* So, we’re not the paints
* How about Faints
* No, we don’t fall over and pass out
* Nor do we zig zag like a rabbit, trying to feint
* So, not the faints, feints
* What are we then, who press on toward perfection
* I’ve been retired from 43 year IT career now for 6 months, fast 6 months
* And you can take the boy out of the Data Center, but you can’t take the data center out of the boy
* So I turn my IT past – I suggest we are the Maints
* Maint as in system maintenance
* For we do need maintenance as we press on to perfection
* So as we look at Sainthood, I want to look at system maintenance for parallels
* First, let’s look at system bugs
* Anyone ever suffered from a computer bug or a computer glitch?
* Anyone ever cause a computer glitch?
* Infamous glitches – 2003 power grid shut down in north east, caused by software
* Honda had to recall hundreds of thousands of cars due to software errors in car
* My own car – recent discovery that VW intentionally had software fake emissions results to EPA
* Couple years ago, check engine light came on in my VW. Dealer diagnosed it as need for new engine software, so I paid a few hundred dollars for new software for my car
  + - Found this incredibly ironic
  + Went along with it since computer software had been so good to me for so long
* So computer glitches happen
* What is a computer glitch or bug?
* Something that is supposed to work, fails
* What in our lives is supposed to work, but fails, hindering our advancement to sainthood?
* Thinking of really serious bugs, or life events
* Something so serious that it can cause a Crisis of Faith
* Most or all of us have suffered from one or more crisis of faith
* Where we ask, where are you God?
* How many of us have used the expression that begins “how can a loving God allow…”
* What sadness this invokes
* We so feel love and compassion for someone who is so low, so devastated, that such words could be said
* Yet, I suspect that many of us, most of us? have said this at
* time or another
* It is incredibly condescending and uncaring for us who hear these words to respond with “how can you question God?”
* Someone so hurt to say “how could a loving God allow this?” is in anguish.
* It is ours to respond with loving actions and loving words
* We are to show in real and tangible ways that God is loving
* We are to be the physical presence of the Love of God, our God, the great comforter
* It is ours to reveal the loving power of God’s amazing Holy Spirit
* When we hear these words, we need to respond in love, in care, not in harsh words of reproach
* We need to show the love of God
* To help the one suffering know and feel God’s presence
* The duty does not belong to the crushed person who said those words, but the duty is ours, as Christians, to show that God is Love, God is present
* We are to be the bug fix
* We are to help restore the person to full spiritual health
* So fix the bugs
* Remove the glitches
* Next component in system maintenance is to consider system upgrades
* Think in terms of an operating system upgrade for your smart phone
* New capability
* And maybe fixes to small bugs
* But mostly new features, new stuff
* I’ve used this language before, but it really rings with me
* Who here had Love Chapter 1Cor 13 read at your wedding?
* Love is patient, Love is kind -- remember those words?
* Been married almost 41 years, I don’t remember what scripture was read at our wedding
* I asked Carol – she doesn’t remember either
* I don’t think 1 Cor 13 was read at our wedding since we were married before Paul wrote the letter
* Now what did Paul write before he wrote 1 Cor 13?
* Yeah, I know chapter 12
* But what is in chapter 12?
* Paul discusses spiritual gifts in chapter 12
* So before he wrote about love, Paul wrote about spiritual gifts
* That give you an idea of how important spiritual gifts are
* What are spiritual gifts?
* Not skills you learned in college or trade school
* Spiritual gift is not speaking French
* But oddly, includes speaking in tongues
* Does not include tuning your home’s furnace, but does include preaching, teaching, comforting, healing
* Spiritual gifts come from God’s holy spirit and are not skill we learn
* You either have a spiritual gift or you don’t
* But we’re not always aware of our own spiritual gifts
* Take Pastor Doug’s class on spiritual gifts, or take the district’s similar class. I’ve done both
* Purpose of such classes is to help us understand the gifts we have, the passion we have for types of service
* Just because you have worked in accounting and are a CPA does not indicate that your top spiritual gift is in church administration
* Might be music or teaching or comforting those who suffer
* So if you haven’t taken a class on Discovering your Spiritual Gift, I suggest you do so
* So when the class is complete and for those of you who have already taken such a class
  + Look for ways to use your top 1 or 2 gifts
  + Speak with Pastor Suzanne about your gifts and passions
  + Complete the bulletin and newsletter surveys that have appeared recently about serving in the church in areas of interest
* The idea of finding spiritual gifts and using that information in making church assignments is to place each of us in roles that we like
* No good comes from putting any of us in roles for which we are ill-suited.
* Like, I will never be a Trustee
* I will never design art projects for Sunday School kids
* But I will continue to seek opportunities to lead, to teach, to encourage
* So this discussion of using spiritual gifts is intended to
  + Help us Make a better version of ourselves
  + Help us Find a way to make contributions to God’s kingdom, in areas in which we are gifted and feel passion
  + And perhaps to touch others along the way, perhaps moving a touch step to sainthood
* So we’ve looked at glitches, and new releases
* What else is there Is there in system maintenance?
* Preventive maintenance
* Like having HVAC technician to annual maintenance of your heating/cooling system
* Or following manufacturer’s guidelines on maintenance for your car
* Following such keeps the machine operating at a high level, helps prevent breakdowns
* With computer systems, maintenance is similar in concept. Mechanical parts are inspected, cleaned. Tests are run on electronic parts to make sure all circuits are working
* All done to maximize the system
* How about us? do we need preventive maintenance?
* I first thought of spiritual maintenance as I pondered this
* But physical needs are certainly important as well
* Exercise, medical checkups for those of us of a certain age are vital
* These are part of preventive maintenance
* Marriage relationships need preventive care. Take time to be with your spouse, take time show your appreciation and love
* And spiritually, it is vital that we take steps to be proactive in our faith
* Don’t wait for something to go wrong to look at faith
* Be active
* Join a small group and I love the variety of small groups we have here.
* This fall, we had running at the same time on Wednesday evenings these activities:
  + choir practice for our musicians,
  + a class on the theology found in JK Rowling’s Harry Potter,
  + a class on the travels and ministry of Paul
  + and a class on leadership based on the writings of NFL coach Tony Dungy
* That is a variety
* Our district is constantly offering classes on variety of topics. Just this weekend, we offer a class on laity giving pastoral care, another class on preaching basics, and another class that offers introduction to the Methodist church. Another round of similar classes will come in March
* So training opportunities, in small groups are all around us
* Find a small group and plug in
* Make new friends, learn new things
* Expand your circle of friendships and your circle of knowledge
* While I am a loud advocate for studying the scriptures, it is just as important or even more so, to be in prayer
* Prayer is more than sharing your list of concerns, even sharing your concerns is a part of prayer
* Prayer is giving attention and time to God, to communicate
* Components of some prayer can be described by the acronym ACTS
* ACTS of prayer
* A is for Adoration -- praise God for the glory of the creation, for the amazing life and sacrifice of Jesus, for all of God’s splendor
* C is for Confession – confess your sins. This can be the longest part of my prayers
* T is for Thanksgiving -- thank God for the rich blessings which have been poured out on us, not sprinkled, but poured. We have a Savior, we have family, friend, this church, this nation, our material wealth. All of these gifts are from God, so be thankful
* S is for Supplication – the part of prayer that comes easiest to many, asking God’s blessing on those who mourn, those who hurt, those who struggle. Some call this intercession
* So ACTS when in prayer
* Prayer does not need fancy terms or in King James English. Be yourself, use your words, Adore, Confess, Thank, and show love for others in your prayers
* Wonderful step in maintaining spiritual health
* Such spiritual preventive maintenance can help you maintain a healthy spiritual life
* And move us closer to the perfection that Paul writes of
* For that is our target, that perfection that is in living with and for Jesus
* Press on for the heavenly goal of life in Christ Jesus
* Press on to perfection
* Others will notice your bug fixing, your system upgrades, and most of all, your preventive maintenance
* Be that example for, your friends, your children, your grandchildren
* Each of these people need role models, like the saints
* Each of these people need guides around which to model their lives
* Be that person
* Be that model
* Be that saint for them