Today we celebrate All Saints Sunday – the community of saints who have gone before us – our parents, spouses, children and others who bore God to us. Each of our lovesdones has a story of how they remained open to and faithful to serving God despite challenges of life.

Within that context, I’d like us to reflect today upon three examples of relatively modern-day people who also remained open to God and faithfully served God in their daily lives. These are officially recognized as Holy People, with their own saints days in the Episcopal Church, although as we will see they aren’t much different than any of us or any of our relatives within the community of saints.

The first is Richard Upjohn, born in England in 1802. As a young man he was apprenticed to a builder and eventually became a master mechanic. He emigrated to the United States and in New York city, was asked to work on alterations to Trinity Church Wall Street. But, that alteration project was canceled. Later, however, he was commissioned to design a new Trinity church, which is the building that still stands today to the glory of God and to the memory of many 9-11 first responders. Upjohn continued his career as an architect, designing many churches but also many secular buildings. He is honored annually on Dec 16.

William Worrall Mayo also lived in the 19th century. His first job was as a pharmacist at a New York City hospital. He later moved west, spending a little time in Buffalo and then in Indiana, where he earned a living as a tailor and then felt called to help during a cholera outbreak there. That led to his attending classes at Indiana Medical College and later graduating with a degree in medicine from the University of Missouri. Still Mayo worked at many other trades, farming, operating a ferry service, serving as justice of the peace, as a newspaper editor, and even a state senator while trying to set up a successful medical practice. Then one day a devastating tornado hit Rochester, Minn., and seriously injured many people. Mayo and his two sons, William J Mayo and Charles H Mayo, both also medically trained, set up a small hospital to treat the wounded. That hospital grew into what is now the Mayo Clinic, ranked the No. 1 hospital last year by US News and World Report. That hospital specializes in treating difficult cases on referral from other physicians around the country. The Mayos are honored with a feast day in our liturgical calendar on March 6.

Frances Perkins, was born in 1880 and died in 1965. She began her career as a teacher, then became head of the New York Consumers League, advocating for better working conditions. Her husband lost his inheritance and suffered from mental illness, making her the sole support of her family, which also included a daughter who suffered from severe depression and was frequently hospitalized. Perkins held several positions in New York state government, championing minimum wage and unemployment insurance laws, as well as reducing the workweek for women to 48 hours a week. She helped pull in the support of labor for FDR in his campaign for president and in 1933 was appointed Secretary of Labor, a post she held for 12 years. In accepting this position, she became the first woman to hold a cabinet post and also became the longest serving cabinet member in US history. In that position, she led many New Deal initiatives including the Civilian Conservation Corps, the labor portion of the National Industrial Recovery Act, the Social Security Act and the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established the first national minimum wage and overtime laws. She also formed government policy for working with labor unions and led the country through dealing with the many labor questions that arose during World War II. Her feast day is May 13.

So here we have three examples of regular people, doing regular secular tasks. These regular people all had struggles. Upjohn was an immigrant in a strange land. He was sent off to do a job – to make alterations on church – that subsequently didn’t happen and we can imagine that when this job didn’t get off the ground, he became discouraged, perhaps as some of us would if a job we were sent to fell through. But, of course, God had something else in mind for him. Upjohn is a saint because despite struggles, he remained open to God and faithful to God. And, in the end, God brought comfort and satisfaction to him and has brought comfort to others through him.

Mayo at first seemed to be a man who can’t quite hold a job – or at least not a job that can support his family. He tries everything – farming, ferry boat driving, newspaper editing. Yet we see this call to healing appear in and out of his life until, finally, God calls him amid the circumstances of a natural disaster to establish a hospital. Despite the struggles and roaming, Mayo remained open and faithful to God. He is a saint and God has brought comfort to him and to others through him.

Perkins also suffered ordeals in her life, having both a husband and daughter who suffered from mental illness.

At that time that she surely must also have encountered some unfairness and chauvinism in the workplace because she was a woman. Yet she is also a saint because throughout her ordeals she remained open to God’s leadership and ultimately God brought comfort to her and to others through her.

We all have within us the capacity for sainthood because we all have Christ within us. We, like loved ones that we remember today, serve God as saints in our occupations every day, as we remain faithful and open to God, despite challenges. Those challenges might be feeling foreign or alien or alone in a strange place where we struggle to fit in. Or perhaps we expect to receive a job, only to have it end before it starts. Or, perhaps we are struggling to figure out just what God is calling us to do or with how to feed our families. Or perhaps we struggle or have loved ones who struggle with discrimination or with mental illness. Whatever our challenges, we are saints as we remain faithful and open to God. And God will bring comfort to us and to others through us.

Amen