

ALL SAINTS DAY SERMON

November 1, 2020

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Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

In the Beatitudes, Jesus provides a unique description of those who are blessed with God's favor. His teaching is surprising and shocking to those who seek wealth, fame, and control over others.

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

“BLESSED AND GRATEFUL”

Jesus calls us blessed in all these opposing ways. In the Beatitudes, “blessed” means we are seen by God, known by God in all our circumstances, all our sin, all our bests efforts to cope, to do right. We are called blessed. The most common read of the Beatitudes points out how Jesus lifts up those on the margins of his time and of ours. Those who are in sorrow and isolation, those not accepted, those who are hungry, and so on.

In our times, and culturally, being “blessed” has meant success, easy living and the showering of all good things: health, wealth, power and position.

Jesus turns that “blessed” concept on its head. “Blessed” according to Jesus is who you are not what you have. Who knows us, not who we know—the God who sees and loves you wherever you are, who blesses you and loves you. That’s the God Jesus shows us in the Beatitudes.

So in a year of huge challenges such as 2020 has held: pandemic; hurricanes; fires; economy; deaths; injustice; unemployment; hunger. We as God’s people have lived and walked

in and through many of these experiences in 2020, and we probably haven't said we were "blessed" to do so.

Instead, in many instances, we have been brought low, have behaved poorly, and have not kept our footing as who we are in "normal" times. We've been knocked off our feet; we may have lost ourselves in the midst of all of these challenges, at least for a time.

That's what crisis does; that's how fear and anxiety unravel our usual behavior, our long-held values, our upbringing, and our ability to see beyond ourselves, to feel compassion, to extend patience. To hold out our best selves to one another; to stay the course of who we are.

Yet all these hard things have brought out all our worst selves at times. All these long months we've not felt blessed. Still, now and always, Jesus is here. Sees us. Names us. Claims us. Calls us blessed, even when we don't feel it. And especially when we don't deserve it. Calls us back to our identity as children of God. Loved and known by God in Christ.

This text on All Saints Day this year may be that reminder of who we are in God's eyes. Luther described us as sinners and saints—always human/sinful yet also always made holy in baptism. We are called saints, both in this life and in death. We need to remember God's claim on us as saints this year, and to strive all the more to show our saintliness to one another.

On All Saints Day, we remember who we are in God's eyes, and we also remember our loved ones who have died, especially in the last year. We remember all the blessed dead who have gone to spend eternity in the loving embrace of God. We remember, and we name those we love. Say the name of someone you loved and lost aloud...whether this year or another year. Take a moment now, say their names. Those who are your loved ones, out loud. (Pause)

I've heard it said that we die three deaths: 1) physically die; 2) buried, and 3) when no one says your name anymore. So we remember and say names out loud to call those loved ones to mind; to speak aloud their names as testimony to our love for them, and also to bear witness that we believe in a God who raises the dead; who promises eternal life; who never forgets a name; whose love never ends—for the dead, and for us, the living.

On All Saints Day, it is fitting to walk through the cemetery (I recorded this sermon in a Waverly cemetery): and to remember 1) the living—in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says we are "blessed" in the humility and losses of life. So we strive anew to be the saints God made us in baptism, though still human and sinful. And to remember 2) the dead—remembered by name; in stones and pictures; in our hearts; always. Examples, finally, of God's fulfilled promise of new life.

AMEN.