

November 1st Worship All Saints Day

Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes

He said:

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 be shown 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 because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Beatitudes

I can remember a few times when I thought the world was pretty upside down – like when we lived through Hurricane Gloria while living in Connecticut. Trees down everywhere so travel anywhere was severely limited – and if you could get out for groceries – well COVID has let many of you have a similar experience – empty shelves -especially of the things you most wanted like bread and milk. It felt like an eternity, but it was only about 10 days before we were able to be more normal. But now, in this time, the physical world around us looks pretty normal, but COVID has turned many lives and expectations upside down. In March I thought this situation might last a few weeks and we could go on to doing the things we've always done. Larry and I were planning a wonderful trip, opportunities to see friends abroad – or even more routine things like celebrating birthdays with family – but right now we're even reconsidering our normal family gathering for Thanksgiving. We've had to learn to do things in new ways (like zoom and Facebook live), and even *not* doing what used to be normal because we don't know when the upheaval and uncertainty will end. How many of us long to just be together again? I don't know about you, but there are days I feel like our world is pretty broken. The world may not have been perfect, but I still long for the world I knew before. I long for a day when I'm not hearing the increasing losses and worrying about the safety of friends and neighbors.

Beyond the losses of loved ones, you may be experiencing other losses as well. Some have lost employment or income or connection with friends. We've had to learn how to navigate the world in new ways; masks are but one change. How is the world different for you and what are you longing for?

As Jesus sits there on the mountainside and shares these words we know as the Beatitudes, he reminds us that the world God intends is not the world we have

typically encountered. I don't know what your experience of the beatitudes is. I do remember someone saying these were like "be-attitudes" – ways we are to be or act, but that didn't work for me. I don't always feel like mourning or being meek. And just what does *blessed* mean in this context? The Greek word is *Makarios* and can be interpreted as 'fortunate' or 'happy' – but that doesn't really fit either. Another suggestion is the Hebrew word *asher* which means 'to find the right road'. Words matter; they help us understand what Jesus was trying to convey. The real point, I believe, is the beatitudes speak about what God values. Thus an example might be, "you are on the right road when you are merciful, for you will receive mercy' or 'you are on the right road when you walk not in the way of unrighteousness (or injustice) but in the way of the Law of God'. Jesus was calling this crowd to hear and walk in the way of God's will for our lives.

Imagine how that crowd gathered by Jesus felt when they heard him offering words of encouragement to them. I imagine many of them were like many today who don't normally experience being blessed by the world around them. These blessings don't immunize one from pain or loss, but the blessings at least acknowledged the struggles many faced. God sees you, blesses and accompanies you no matter what you're struggling with. Numerous times as we've journeyed with Matthew's Gospel, we have heard the message – "the kingdom of heaven is like". The Beatitudes are part of that message – an invitation to see God's kingdom as different from the world around us. It's not about more rules – more like having a new heart to see that God loves and blesses those who seek God's way.

The calendar designates this day as All Saints day so it's a wonderful time to remember those who have gone to be part of that great cloud of witnesses. One little vignette I recall was someone finding a little girl in the sanctuary looking at

the stained-glass windows. She was asked what she was seeing. She answered that she was looking at the saints – they were the ones God’s light shines through. Who are the ones around us that God’s light shines through? I can’t help but think of John Lewis who called on all of us to keep working for justice. Not a stranger to discrimination and even abuse, he kept the focus on that ‘someday’ when we can all be respected for who we are. On this day we commend to God all those we can no longer see, touch, or hold – especially Geri Thom and Sid Smith. As we do, we remember the Easter promise – there is more that transcends our immediate experience. That promise is rooted in our confidence in God’s love which is more powerful and enduring than what surrounds us. As we journey through the days ahead, may we remember what Jesus showed us. There is a new day beyond this one and God continues to bless us – even in these challenging days – that we might be a blessing to those around us. We are indeed blessed and beloved of God.