

**All Saint's Sunday 2017: Matthew 5:1-12: The Beatitudes**

Blessed All Saint's Day to you all!

Blessed. Saint. These two words stand out to me today, and I think they may need some defining: blessed. Saint.

I'll start with saint. For some the word may evoke the ideals of perfection. One who has died and was the epitome of righteousness and humility; a divine servant who performed miracles. - Maybe some of that is true, but most human beings whom I have known are not perfect. We are human after all, imperfect and sinful, broken and with tendencies of narcissism, judgment, and power trips due to fear of death. We are a species which thinks for itself, and therefore attempts to rely only on ourselves. To say we have control issues is an understatement!

YET-- despite these human flaws and imperfections, there are saints: both the living and the dead. Maybe a saint can be defined not as one who is perfect, but one who has lived authentically and vulnerably in their trust of God's grace. Being an example for others. One whom others look to for guidance, encouragement, and inspiration because they carry a light of truth towards something beyond themselves. That will be our working definition of a saint today: not perfect- but true to one's self and their identity in God.

**Now for the word "blessed" ....**

The word "blessed" doesn't seem like a word we use too often in our vernacular today. How many of you have heard someone use this word lately on a regular basis? How many have felt "blessed" in their daily lives? What in this world does "blessed" mean?!

I have encountered people who share they feel blessed by good weather, or maybe because they just received a job offer, or a scholarship/grant for school. But then, couldn't we substitute those emotions with the word happy, or feeling fortunate? What makes the word "blessed" a relatable word for our context? What does it mean to be "blessed" in the systems of the world today? Is it truly only about what we receive?

**"Greatly honored" is what some modern theologians prefer to use instead of "blessed".**

But "greatly honored" ....I don't know if this translation of blessed makes our reading of the Beatitudes any easier....

Greatly honored are those who are poor in spirit?

Greatly honored are those who mourn, or who are meek?

Greatly honored are those who are persecuted and reviled.

Honored? By whom? Not in this world's systems!

No, I think what I often encounter in this world is a different set of beatitudes:

- Blessed are the well educated, for they will get the jobs.
- Blessed are the well-connected, for their aspirations will not go unnoticed.
- Blessed are you when you know what you want, and go after it with everything you've got, for God helps those who help themselves.
- Blessed are those with authority and power, for they will always be the peacemakers of the world.
- Blessed are those who pretend to have it all together, for they will fake it until they make it.
- Blessed are those with the loudest voice, for they speak the truth and will be heard, believed and followed.

Yes, this is more of what I have encountered as the definition of blessed in the world's systems. Maybe you have too?

Too often, the Beatitudes are looked upon as a check-list for success to get into the kingdom of God; but Jesus turns the world's systems and ideals of success upside down in the Beatitudes.

Jesus proclaims a new world -- a new kingdom order -- and protests against the current world order and systems of oppression and power, ruthless authority, fear, hatred and divisiveness. Jesus himself takes on the identity of the mourning, when he mourns for Lazarus, the merciful when pardoning the adulterous. Jesus even identifies with the persecuted and the reviled when he is chased out of town after he reads the proclamation in the synagogue, he is continuously attempted to be entrapped by the Pharisees, and is finally crucified by those in authority.

But death does not win. The systems of perceived order, justice and righteousness,- Jesus crushes in his very act of resurrection!

Jesus pays attention to those whom the world wants to silence. Jesus proclaims as greatly honored those whom the world sees as nuisances and broken. Jesus pronounces love upon those whom the world regards unlovable. Jesus blesses those whom the world refuses to bless. Jesus redeems whom the world does not believe is worth saving. What was thought of as weakness, is divinely embraced and loved unconditionally as authentic and true.

Authentic. Vulnerable. This is the proclamation of the Beatitudes: although the world may label you as something other, God labels, claims, and loves you as you are able to be despite the cruelty of this world.

This is so freeing! This frees us to look at our neighbor as a child of God, vulnerable and real as they are in their mourning, or in their meekness, or in their moments of doubt.

Jesus isn't so much teaching us how to be blessed or honored, as to show us who is already blessed and greatly honored in our midst.

It's not so much about how to take pity on those in the Beatitudes as it is to being invited into their losses, pain, and suffering, and see them as God sees them: greatly honored; greatly loved; not lost, not alone.

As we surround ourselves this Saints' Sunday with pictures of our loved ones whom we claim as Saints in our lives, Jesus speaks through the Beatitudes to us.

The world view shares that our dead are "lost." We even share condolences sometimes to our friends and family on the "loss" of their loved one. But Jesus reframes what the world defines as lost in the Beatitudes. Our "lost" loved ones are not lost, but rather live now in the presence of God. Although they are beyond this world's immediate reach, they are connected to us through memory, faith and love.

God's kingdom is NOT limited -- it transcends beyond time!

The cloud of witnesses ... the communion of saints ... even those who have lived imperfectly vulnerable and authentic, are not lost; are not so distant beyond our reach. We entrust them to God's care ... to God's presence.

As professed Christians, we proclaim God's presence here and now among us. The saints are not lost! They are here among us now! Such a reversal of what the world tells us upon burial ... they are gone, lost forever into the grave.

Today, we celebrate the saints who have died, but we also have the living saints among us now. All of you! We are both sinner and saint. Imperfect and yet made perfect in Christ. Broken and yet redeemed. The world paints one image of blessedness and Jesus flips it all upside down and shares another. Jesus tells us to look at our neighbor as God does: claimed, forgiven, redeemed and unconditionally loved.

Pope Francis, on All Saints' Day last year, stating that the Beatitudes are the "identity card" of the saints, proposed a more modern rendering of the Beatitudes:

- Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by others and forgive them from their heart.
- Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalized and show them their closeness.
- Blessed are those who see God in every person and strive to make others also discover him.
- Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home.
- Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others.
- Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians.

Although this is not the world's view, we hold onto the promise of a day where those blessed by God will not hunger or thirst, where there will no longer be mourning, or persecution, reviling or injustices. Where we see and give witness to glimpses of the kingdom of God now

through the saints, and yet mourn that the fullness of the kingdom is not yet, we trust in the unity and redemption of Christ to the world.

**And until that day of the kingdom's fulfillment, the Beatitudes stand as a daring act of protest against the current world order.**

And so my dear brothers and sisters,

May you see the world and encounter it as God sees it; as blessed.

May you know you are blessed in your vulnerability; freeing you from the world's oppression and labels.

And may you, knowing you are greatly honored for being your authentic self, have the freedom to act out of love, and to be a blessing to others.

Amen.