

Sermon All Saints Sunday A  
All Saints, Mt. Pleasant  
Rev. Ginger Litman-Koon  
November 1, 2020

Matthew 5:1-21

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

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Dee Teslaa, 80 of Grand Rapids, Michigan. "Our Grandma was the best and we miss her so very much."  
Pura Fernandez, 87 of Berkeley, California. "She worked as a caregiver for seniors & her daughter. It was thankless work but she always had a smile on her face. She will be missed by her family, friends & neighbors."

Edward Ferro, 61 of Southern California. "He lived his life being a pure example of selfless love...His one in a million laugh, that big smile, & his love for others will forever be remembered."

A Twitter Account called "Faces of Covid" was launched in March, honoring the lives of those lost to COVID-19. It now has over 110,000 followers. Their tagline simply reads: "They were more than a statistic."

Anna Carter, age 13, of Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Anna was a "super fun, loving, kind, and empathetic child, loved dance and hanging out with her friends and siblings."

On All Saints Day, we pause to remember those who have died. This All Saints Day, we find ourselves surrounded by the presence of death in a way we never have been before in our lifetime. We are in the midst of a deadly pandemic that is showing no signs of slowing down as we head into the winter months. It is impossible to wrap our minds around the sheer magnitude of the numbers of not just Americans, but people all over the world who have died. But as the "Faces of Covid" project seeks to highlight, these are not just numbers. They are people. Every single person lost was a parent, sibling, child, spouse, partner, neighbor or friend. Every single one was a life that mattered.

Now keep that in mind, as you listen again to the verses we heard today from Revelation: John of Patmos writes, "I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' Then

he said to me, ‘These are they who have come out of the great ordeal.’” These who are gathered around the throne of the Lamb, today are the ones who have come out of the great ordeal - Whether they are the faces of the covid statistics, or our own loved ones we are remembering today - They have now been redeemed. They have made it through.

John goes on: “They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat... and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Each one of those among the great multitude who now have entered into the joy of the Father who are rejoicing with the angels at the feast that has no end, each of those saints left a mark on our lives. Each and everyone one of these paper doves up here carries not just a name, but an identity of someone whose memory is real & tangible for us. Someone who made a lasting impact on us, someone who bore the image of God in our lives, in one way or another.

I was recently pondering this idea on the occasion of the passing of one of our own dearly departed here at All Saints. We teach that we were all created in the image of God. And so that means that for our time here on earth, we bear the image of God to those around us. I began to think about what that really means - the image of God. I began to imagine what it would be to behold the fullness of the image of God. And the image that came to me was that of a diamond. Picture the fullness of the beauty and mercy and goodness of God as a priceless jewel, of immeasurable scope, made up of innumerable different tiny facets that each reflect and refract God’s light in each in a different way.

If the image of God were like that myriad-sided jewel, then perhaps each of us, in our own way, reflect one small facet of the light of the fearfully and wonderfully complex Most High God. And so each one of the saints that we hold in our hearts today, reflected their own fragment of God’s beauty and light for us. Perhaps what they showed us was a glimpse of God’s compassion or a sliver of his wisdom, or a bit of God’s infinite patience, or a portion of his limitless love for all creation.

That’s why this day - which is truly a celebration day - can be so difficult. because with each name we lift before God today, a fragment of God’s glorious light no longer shines for us here on earth. Despite our loss, we give thanks to God for their gain, and that now, before the throne of the Lamb, “God has wiped away every tear from their eyes.” Those standing before God this All Saints Day have made it through the great ordeal. But we have not. In fact, we may feel more like those pitiable figures that we hear about in Matthew 5 today than shining reflections of God’s glory.

In fact, as I read our Matthew passage this week, I’ve never identified more with the poor in spirit, the meek and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness than I do this All Saints Day. When Jesus says today, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, Blessed are those who mourn, Blessed are the meek, Blessed are you when people revile you and utter all kinds of evil against you,” For the first time, I hear Jesus talking about me. For me, these words have always described “someone else.” Sure, I’ve had my moments, my difficult seasons, but nothing so emotionally suffocating like I feel this year.

I need Jesus to call me blessed. Because I sure as heck can’t call myself that. I need Jesus to remind me to “rejoice and be glad” right now, because lately, I’ve been forgetting that part. And what I really need is for Jesus to tell me that this “great ordeal” will - eventually - come to an end. Being in this state of worry, uncertainty, and distress makes me really ask the question that Jesus’ hearers - the poor, the hungry and the mourning - must have asked themselves: Teacher, how can you call me blessed? Me?

Being as poor in spirit as I am right now? How can you call me blessed, Meek and mourning like I am right now? Master, how can you call me blessed, reviled as I am by the other side?

Jesus' response comes, as it always does: *Because it is to such as you that I have given the kingdom of heaven. "Because it is such as you that I have called children of God. "I didn't come to earth to pat the backs of the winners - I came to gather the brokenhearted. "I didn't come to pump up the powerful - I came to encourage the meek. Those who are coming out of this great ordeal "on top" - they have already found their reward. Those of you who are bearing each other's burdens, and shouldering one other's grief and remembering the lost and feeding the hungry and wrestling with the scriptures with a renewed thirst for righteousness... you are who I'm here for. It is in your midst where I will always be found.*

And just, as he promised, Christ has been found here - in our midst - even at our lowest. When we had to shutter the doors, he opened a way for us to keep the praise of his name alive among this community called All Saints. When we had to scrap our Christian Education plan, Christ showed up - on Zoom of all places! - in our Bible Study, in our holy conversation, in kids singing and youth growing and deepening their faith from their own living rooms.

When our service projects got cancelled, a wagon showed up to minister to Christ by feeding the least of these in our community. And when your vacations got cancelled, you showed up to volunteer - to refurbish spaces and run a yard sale and pick okra and make phone calls and provide meals and send cards . We have opened our campus up to scouting groups and Alcoholics Anonymous, and a synagogue and respite care, all in the midst of a time of complete and utter depletion. We have realized how blessed we actually are to be a part of the Community of Christ that we call All Saints.

Thank you for shining God's light to one another and to our community in a dark time. Thank you for bearing the image of God to me and to Pastor Kris. Each of you are shining reflections of the light and love of Christ to the world around you. You have given us hope. You have lifted our spirits. You have encouraged us so much. We feel so blessed to be a part of this community right now.

We know being church doesn't feel the same right now. But every time we hear your voice on the other end of the line or see your faces on a Zoom call or watch you carrying your lawn chairs out back for Sunday School you encourage us by your faith and by the strength and hope and light we witness here at All Saints. That's why I think it's so appropriate that the stewardship team Selected the hymn we are about to sing as we bring forward our Statement of Intent cards to make our Commitment to God for our giving next year: "Blest be the Tie that Binds."

We are blessed. We are so blessed to have one another here. We are blessed by all the things you have enabled us to keep doing, despite the things we are unable to do. We may feel poor in spirit, we may be mourning or experiencing a deep hunger and thirst for anything resembling righteousness out there right now...but we are blessed, because it is among us - the broken and humble - that Christ promises to dwell, to bind our hearts in his love, and at the last, to gather us as one into that great multitude around his heavenly throne.