

“For All the Saints”
All Saints Sunday – November 1, 2020 – Matthew 5:1-12

You have heard, I’m sure, that “All Dogs Go to Heaven” and it is wonderful to imagine them, waiting at the gate (with cats and horses and your whole lifetime of pets) with that unconditional love and excitement that companion animals provide so freely. And after *that* greeting, your people come as well. Waiting to greet you and (now, even more wonderful) to embrace you and to gather you up and welcome you home.

All Saints Sunday is not just about the saints who’ve gone before us into the Communion of Saints. It is not just about the Great Reunion that awaits those who have now joined the Great Cloud of Witnesses. It’s also about us who are living, and it’s about those who will come. The lineage and the heritage of the saints of the future has already been promised - that God’s children do God’s work with our hands while we reside in this world - and will return home to belong to the Church Triumphant. Finally, we will once again be with the one who has always loved us best, our heavenly Creator.

From the very beginning *God created*. It was how he started and also how he shaped the world and us. From the very beginning of his ministry among us, *Jesus healed*. It was how he started and how he shaped what would happen next. Nowhere do we see this trajectory more clearly than in Matthew’s Gospel. Jesus was born into political conflict. He lived his early life as a refugee and returned to grow into the ministry to which he had been called. He was sent off to do this work through the waters of baptism, and then prepared through his time in the wilderness. Today’s passage follows Jesus and the first four of his newly-minted *disciples* – Peter, Andrew, James and John - as he begins his public teaching with The Sermon on the Mount.

“When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, the place to go for those who wish to get closer to God. Jesus sat down and began to teach his disciples (remember, at this point there are only four of them, so the conversation might have been fairly intimate.) However, there were crowds of people who had come to see Jesus, bringing their sick, their dying, their diseased, their despairing. They had probably *not* come to hear him teach, but to see him act; and they were desperate to get just a glimpse of this man whose fame as a healer was spreading like wildfire.

Yet it is clear from the very first words of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, that there would not be just words, but acts of healing that came from these words, which we know as The Beatitudes. Beatitudes, the Latin word for Blessings, were common in ancient writings; they were little pronouncements of God’s favor on certain situations and actions when God is in the process of reversing and transforming current injustices. They were meant to reassure people experiencing distress and announce that God’s favor was with them. It’s as if God was singling out certain groups of people who were especially in need of reassurance that God loved even them. Sort of like the church declaring that “Black Lives Matter”, or a nurse making sure that a dying Covid patient hears, “You are not alone.”

This was the crowd that assembled on the flat place at the foot of the mountain. They were day laborers, tax collectors, farmers and fishermen. They lived day to day with nothing left over. They were uneducated, mostly illiterate, and they were poor. When any further mishap or illness or fluke of nature added to their burden, they had very little strength to survive, much less chance to thrive. They were desperate and, more than anything in their world, they were hurting. They needed to know they had value. That they were worth something to somebody. That they were not disposable.

And onto this throng of the children of God, Jesus poured the ointment of words of hope and healing. Jesus spoke to them as a whole – not to us individually, or who don’t need to be healed – but to those who might not last one more day. This is what Jesus told them:

Even though you flag in the face of overwhelming situations,
the kingdom of heaven belongs to you.
Even when you are crushed by grieving yet one more loss,
God’s arms of comfort are there for you.
Even when you don’t have the strength to stand up to oppressors,
it will be you who inherits the earth.
Even if you are running on empty because of injustice,
you will be filled to overflowing by God.
Believe this:
When you show the tiniest bit of mercy to another,
you will receive God’s mercy as blessing
When your heart is filled with pure intentions, you will see God.

When you make peace, folks will call you Children of God.
 When you are persecuted for doing the right thing,
 the kingdom of heaven is your kingdom as well.

You are blessed by God when people call you names, and tell lies about you and speak falsely, then you can rejoice and be glad that you are in the good company of the prophets, God's messengers of truth.

Can you imagine how it felt to be affirmed as righteous, and good, and loved, and of tremendous worth? Yes. I know you can.

I see you. And God sees you, too. God see even we, who are privileged already. God's healing is always there for us as well, just like the Father's love for the elder son – the son who had worked diligently all of his life for him – did not change when the Father showered welcome and blessings on the son who returned home to repent after running away. Powerful words God speaks. Powerful words of life, we have.

Now, perhaps you are thinking, "if this teaching was only heard by the first four who Jesus had chosen, how did *the rest of the twelve* learn the basics?" Who taught them the Lord's Prayer? Who gave them the words of solace and hope that Jesus has spoken today?

Well, how did **you** first hear the story of God's love in Jesus? Who were the saints that took the time to corral your imagination in the Greatest Story Ever Told? And to whom have you passed along this amazing story? Think about the when's and the how's of this transfer of those powerful words that bring healing and life? Was it when you were babysitting your grandkids, sitting at table with your own children, teaching Sunday School, living a life of grace and mercy that witnessed the godly life to your co-workers or students or teachers or friends? However those moments came to be – **you** were the saint. **You** took advantage of those opportunities at home, at work, at school, in the park, at the cabin, in your cul-de-sac, or at the river to gather and heal.

Now we are in a time where gathering in person is not advised. Those precious moments of sharing stories and food and time are mostly relegated to a snip here and a Zoom there. But they exist. Do not let them pass. You have healing in your wings, O Saints, and you have sat at Jesus' feet, upon the mountain, listening to words that calm you and bring you peace in turbulent times. Healing. Comfort. Peace. Calm. This is the work of Jesus. This is the work of saints. This is how we bring hope.

Today we remember some of those saints who touched our lives within the gathering called Advent Lutheran Church. We pause on this All Saints Sunday, to give thanks for those faithful who have entered the Church Triumphant before us - who have showed us by their witness how to live as people of God, who have passed their faith on to us in story or in person. Those who now are numbered with all the saints in glory. We remember...

Donald Bryson
 Dave Davis
 The Rev. Earl Meissner
 Mary Lorie Swander
 Veryl Tiemeyer
 Gerald Stamm
 Doris Pirotte
 Mary Frances Wolf
 Robert George Thurman
 Meryl Stortz
 Coralee Stuckey
 Matthew Larson
 Sally Michelle Miller
 Edward Johnson
 Thomas Stout
 Joan Link
 The Rev. Kermit Smith
 Connie Hitchcock
 Gary Reeve
 Joel Scudder
 Laverne Boll
 Marge Wyman

Harry D. Goodwin
Linda Crossfield
William D'Souza
The Rev. Ben Diduangleuth
Niki Busch
Jerald Sharp
Ernestine Kunshek
Kenneth Tostenson
Dean Hoag
Daryl Haugen
Ron Larson

All the Saints on our 2020 All Saints list
All the Saints lost to Covid-19 around the world

And finally, for those who do not appear on lists, or in a roll call, but live in the hearts of those they loved, and who loved them in return. Their names may be spoken aloud at this time as we ring the final bell toll of 2020. We remember... (Final Toll) Amen.

Pastor Susan Langhauser
Advent Lutheran Church, Olathe, KS
All Saints Sunday 2020

Resources: Fortress Commentary on the Bible/New Testament, 2014