

Sermon: God in unlikely places
All Saints' Day, Year A
Matthew 5:1-12

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Happy All Saints' Day! Today's Gospel passage from Matthew is the section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, known as the Beatitudes. It is one of the better known pieces of Scripture, I think. While it is a little different than Luke's version of the Beatitudes, let's see how well you know it. Don't look at your insert! I will read part and see if you can fill in the blanks, "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 shall inherit the _____ (earth)." Ya'll are doing well! "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive _____ (mercy)" "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see _____ (God)." And "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Children of _____ (God)." You know this!

You may recall in "Monty Python's Life of Brian" when they reenact the Sermon on the Mount, they don't always HEAR Jesus that well way down the hill. So one person says something like, "What did he say?" And another says, "I think Jesus said, "Blessed are the Greeks!" and then "Blessed are the cheesemakers!" and one woman says, "What makes the cheesemakers so special?" Her husband tells her it's not to be taken literally, that it's about all people involved with the dairy industry. This scene only worked because the producers knew most viewers would have been familiar with the Beatitudes.

Some of you may have never heard these words until today, and some of you may know them by heart. No matter where you are on the Bible literacy spectrum, what do you think of them as you hear them today? Do they ring true in your own experience? Who seems blessed in our culture today? Some would say that the rich, the powerful, the healthy, the young, the physically attractive, and the famous are blessed – at least this seems to be what our culture often values. So perhaps this section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, his inaugural address in the Gospel of Matthew, comes to us as a shock. It would have come to the Jews in first century Palestine as a surprise as well for the people in that place and time had values not that different from our own. These words were a reversal of the status quo.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, sat down in the posture of a teacher with authority, and proceeded to teach the disciples and those around them what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about. In this powerful section of his sermon, Jesus conveys the character and nature of the Kingdom of Heaven and Matthew the writer skillfully proceeds from then on to show us through the rest of his Gospel that Jesus not only preaches these words but he IS the sermon. He personifies it.

Some have said that the Beatitudes are the Gospel message in a nutshell. Here Jesus shows us a trustworthy understanding of how God operates. God values the poor in spirit, values the humble, the meek, the merciful, values those who mourn, values those who desire and work for justice, values those who are pure in heart, values the peacemakers (and the cheese makers). To be human is to be broken and to be vulnerable. And in those broken and

vulnerable places we often find a certain awareness of our need for God. When we are disappointed or hurt, when we fall short, when we fail, God shows up! The Beatitudes are there to help us see that God appears in some pretty unlikely places. We have to learn again and again that we don't have to go on this journey of God alone. We do it together. In community. We learn from the saints who have gone before us and who are with us now how to live out the beatitudes; we learn from them how to love. The saints remind us the God's kingdom is breaking into the present moment and we are on the threshold of the kingdom all the time. All Saints' Day is a time when we remember that there is a long line of those who have gone before us on this journey of faithfulness. And Jesus is with all of us on that path.

To be blessed is to receive something that we cannot produce or muster or create on our own or bestow upon ourselves. We must simply *receive* God's loving presence with an open heart in order to be blessed. To be a saint is to receive God's blessing as we live out these kingdom values – to reach out to the poor in spirit, those who are marginalized in our neighborhoods, in our country and in the world; to stand up against racism and bigotry, to be in solidarity with women and men who have been assaulted or abused, who say “#metoo” who carry the hurt sometimes for decades; to be a saint is to speak truth to power on a local, state, national or world-wide level so that, as today's Revelation passage reads, people of “every nation, tribe and peoples and languages” are treated with dignity and respect. To be a saint is to not turn away when we see abuses of power. To be a saint is not to be perfect though or even close. Because none of us is Jesus. There is only one Jesus. But we can try to follow Jesus. We can try to live into these Kingdom values. We can try to overturn the status quo. Together. Saints together.

Right before the Peace, you are invited to come forward to light a candle in memory of a loved one who has gone on to the Greater Life with God or in honor of a living saint. As you light that candle, you may want to reflect on how the light pierces the darkness, how that person has taught you something about love and therefore something about God.

Amen.