

Blessed

Matthew 5:1-12

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Prayer for Understanding Silence in us any voice but your own, O God, and startle us again with your grace. Amen

Last Sunday, we celebrated All Saints Day. We are saints by the grace of God. We are saints, because God's love adopts us into God's family. We belong to the Kingdom of God. Jesus is God in human flesh. Jesus brought the Kingdom of God to earth. The Holy Spirit inspires us to live the Kingdom of God. We live in the paradox of already and not yet. The Kingdom of God is already here, we are saints, at times we live like saints and the Kingdom of God is not yet fully manifested, we are not yet living like saints all the time. Those moments of pure love, joy, and peace in your life, those are Kingdom of God moments. We will enjoy that and ever-growing love, joy, and peace for eternity. The moments when all is not whole, complete, and perfect, remind us that we are not yet saints living in the Kingdom of God.

God is the source of all holiness, sanctity, blessedness, abundant life, love, joy, and peace. We are freely given all we need to be a perfect saint enjoying the perfect Kingdom of God. God chooses to see us as fully transformed, perfected saints. We are invited to live into our future glory today. God gives us freedom to choose not to exercise our capacity for sainthood that belongs to all of us. Karl Barth said, "It is like being a prisoner who has received a pardon. You are a free person, and your freedom is real, but until you get up and walk through the door of your cell, you are a prisoner of your own failure to act." Or if you do not warm up to that analogy, try this one. It is like knowing there is a check for a million dollars in the next room with your name on it. The money is yours, you are a millionaire, but until you claim it and cash it you are as poor as if it never existed. Common sense puts it another way: use it or lose it, the saying goes and that is the way it is with sainthood too.

Our scripture today is the beatitudes. These teachings of Jesus are abundant with meaning, numerous insights, transforming truths, and generous wisdom. These teachings are living words that reform as the context changes, that reform with each step on your journey. There are multitudes of sermons, commentaries, books, and perceptions of the beatitudes.

One perception is silly. As a former dairy farmer, I believe peacemakers and cheesemakers are all blessed.

I invite you to meditate on the beatitudes in light of your already and not yet sainthood. You are a saint. Your calling is to live as a saint, to love everyone as a saint. Barbra Brown Taylor comments, "You are loved; act like it. You are redeemed; act like it. You are a saint; act like it. Become what you already are and you will be blessed with every breath you take because blessedness—which means happiness, which means joy, which means fullness of life—is just what happens when you are who you were created to be, living the life you were created to live. Which is, incidentally, what the kingdom of God is all about."

The beatitudes are an expounding of the ancient and always relevant covenant between God and all people. We are blessed to be a blessing to everyone. **Matthew 5:1-12 NLT "One day as Jesus saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and Jesus began to teach them. "God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for God, for the Kingdom of God is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of God is theirs. "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way."**

A healthy church welcomes everyone just as they are and inspires them to be perfect, welcomes sinners and inspires them to be saints. Pastor Adam Fronczek wrote, "Church is supposed to show you something different—more challenging, more comforting, and ultimately better than what passes for acceptable in the rest of your life. Church should be a place that is both beautiful and gritty, polished and profane, a place where you are challenged to bring your best and are also accepted just as you are."

People were flocking to Jesus. He accepted people just as they were and forgave them, healed them, welcomed them, and perfected them. Jesus has compassion for everyone. Do you hear the compassion for you, and everyone, in the beatitudes? Jesus knows you, and everyone, knows we are poor, mourning, proud, hungry, resentful, impure, conflicted, and indifferent. The authenticity of the beatitudes stings, identifying how we are not yet saints, and God accepts us as we are, and is transforming us into the blessed, whole, joyful abundant life that the beatitudes describe. The beatitudes encourage us to live into our sainthood today, to fully embrace our belonging to the Kingdom of God, being complete, comforted, whole, satisfied, forgiven, pure, peaceful, and loving.

Jesus' beatitudes are beautiful and deeply challenging, there are numerous messages. We are told not to accept ourselves, and the world, as good enough and we are reassured that we are already good enough because God loves us and all that God has made. Our future, eternal glorious, blessed life that will be freely given to us is described and we are urged to live into our blessed life today.

An aspect of the blessing is being known and loved during our transformation. God knows you and accepts you as weak, wanting to be strong. God knows you and accepts you as grieving, eager to enjoy again every loss forever. God knows you and accepts you as stubborn, learning to live in harmonious community. God knows you and accepts you as hungry, dreaming of loving, joyful abundance for all. God knows you and accepts you as vengeful, striving to be gracious. God knows you and accepts you as sinful, transforming into purity. God knows and accepts you as conflicted, yearning for peace. God knows and accepts you as divisive, learning how to live in equality. A challenge of hearing the beatitudes is to not get stuck in our faults and failings to keep journeying into the blessings, to hear grace, to envision our glorious destiny. God welcomes you just as you are and is transforming you into a blessed person who abundantly blesses everyone.

The word Jesus spoke that we translate as "bless" is not passive, rather active. God is actively blessing you, transforming, sculpting, forgiving, healing, mending you. You, all of us, are to be actively alive, growing, loving, rejoicing. Blessing is emptying ourselves, letting go, opening ourselves, to receive, let come, be free, and live into the magnificent, gifted person we will be for eternity.

You are already blessed and not yet fully blessed. You are already receiving God's blessings and not yet able to take in the grandeur, variety, and scope of your blessed life. Ferris Bueller said, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it." Give thanks for your blessings. Remember you are God's masterpiece in progress. Enjoy the blessings in the present. Explore love. Savor joy. Walker Percy asks, "Is it possible for people to miss their lives in the same way one misses a plane?" and then he describes a man: "Not once in his entire life has he allowed himself to come to rest in the quiet center of himself but forever cast himself forward from some dark past he could not remember to a future that did not exist, not once had he been present for his life. So, his life had passed as a dream."

Celebrate your sainthood and live into your sainthood. **"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for God, for the Kingdom of God is theirs.** We are poor and rich. Everything is a gift of God that God freely gives to us. We are not self-sufficient. God graciously provides. We are not in control. We discover abundant life when we give control to God. We find our life by letting go of our worry about life. We cannot earn love. Love and the bounty of the Kingdom of God is graciously, freely given to us.

God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. We grieve those who have gone before us to heaven. We will rejoice when we are reunited, celebrating every love, joy and delight again for eternity. Max Lucado translates this beatitude as, "Blessed are those who know they are in trouble and have enough sense to admit it." We mourn our failures, shortcomings and mistakes and are comforted when we accept God's grace to bridge every gap. Comfort comes in courage for the present, calm during the storm, companionship for the journey, compassion for shortcomings and confidence for the future.

God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. Humble is also translated as meek. Moses is a humble and meek man. He learned, transformed, and journeyed. The humble are teachable, pliable and sculptable. The humble are open to learning and eager to expand their perceptions.

God blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied. Righteousness is a tenacious quest for right relationships uniting all people. Advocating for love. Empathy for everyone. Serving to provide food, clothing, housing, health care, education, and freedom for all people. Righteousness is a fervent desire for equality.

God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Merciful is also translated forgiving and gracious. Resentment, revenge, and anger are toxic and distort reality and communication. Withholding forgiveness imprisons, makes us bitter and saps are strength. Forgiveness set us free.

God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. Purity is perfection. Free from all guilt, regret, what ifs, sin, and all that diminishes life we are free to love extravagantly, rejoice abundantly and rest peacefully. Our thoughts become pure, positive, and inspiring.

God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. Peacemakers work for peace between people, groups, and countries, mending relationships, celebrating diversity, honor uniqueness and bringing everyone together in harmony. Peacemakers listen to individuals, ask questions, and provide resources to enable a person to overcome anxiety, turmoil, and depression.

God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of God is theirs. “God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.” These blessings remind us again of the already and not yet. We are already saints by God’s grace and not yet living as saints. We already belong to the Kingdom of God and have not yet accepted our inheritance. Because of the, ‘already’ and ‘not yet’, life is a struggle for individuals and the world. We are blessed when we do not give up, lose hope, become indifferent or fear that the darkness will last. Death and all that diminishes life will end. Light will prevail. Love, joy, peace, and life are eternal. We will all enjoy resurrection. We are blessed. We are imperfect. We are transforming into a perfect glorious person and a worldwide harmonious community. We will enjoy being fully blessed for eternity, together in the glorious Kingdom of God. Amen.