

Camille Cook Howe
All Saints Sunday
Good Adventure to You

October 20th, 2022
Georgetown Presbyterian Church
Matthew 5:1-12

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.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Usually when I read the Sermon on the Mount, I hear the beatitudes as a to-do list. This usually does not end with me feeling like I am doing very well – poor in spirit? merciful? meek? But I am pretty sure this was not what Jesus was trying to do when he gave this sermon – he was not preaching a list for people to check off. Jesus went up onto the mountain and sat those disciples down to try and paint a picture. The picture was of the kingdom of God – and the kingdom of God’s reign looked radically different than the earthly reigns they had experienced previously. On earth – the powerful, the rich, the educated, the beautiful – they were the blessed ones. But it in the kingdom of God, Jesus was painting a different landscape of where value and worth and wisdom and blessing could be found. Jesus was pointing them in a different direction and asking them to be oriented towards God’s values.

The list is objectively interesting and probably no one list can fulfill all the list at once – but that is not the point. In the kingdom of God, there will be a cloud of witnesses – people who of various shapes and forms who embodies God’s blessings. What if we read the list and instead of thinking about ourselves, for each beatitude we tried to think of a person who specifically had been an example for us of that attribute? Someone we have known personally or someone who is just known to us.

Who has been a peacemaker in our lives or in the world? Who have we known who has been truly pure in heart? Who has modeled for us hungering and thirsting for righteousness? Who do you know that is meek, merciful, or poor in spirit? For some of the list – names immediately come to mind – for others it takes some time to think about them. I like reading the text in this way because it reframes us to thinking about the blessings of the people who surround us. The kingdom of God is filled with saints – people who have lived into these beatitudes and been blessings to the world around them. We have these saints in our lives and not saints in that they are perfect, but saints in that they model glimpses of God’s light and God’s love and God’s kingdom to the world.

On All Saints Day, we remember specifically the saints in our lives who have died. And we take time to remember these people. To honor them. To reflect on their legacies. To be grateful for the ways they blessed us. These people are what make up the ‘cloud of witnesses’ for us. We each have a cloud of people who have walked alongside, led us, pushed us, believed in us, and just been good examples for us. Upon death, the witness does not dissipate – in some cases it even grows stronger.

I remember one of our new members classes and we asked everyone why they had decided to join the church. The man, who was a young father, said his dad died suddenly that last year. His father was very committed to the church in his hometown and was always asking him if he found a church in Washington yet or not. He knew he should be going to church; he knew he should be taking his children to church, he wanted to, but he just hadn’t. When his father died, this man decided that was it – he was going to make the commitment to join a church and put down roots for his family in a faith community. He said he felt like each week when he went to church it was a blessing in some form or another and the blessing was coming from God but also his father. The blessings are not finished upon death.

In Spanish, the translation of “blessed” from this passage of scripture literally means “good adventure to you.” Listen, then, to how the Beatitudes sound in the paraphrase of a Spanish

speaking pastor: good adventure to you whose hearts are genuinely with the poor: you are under God's protective rule. Good adventure to you who are without power: the whole world shall be yours. Good adventure to you who are hungry and thirsty for justice: your cup will be filled. Good adventure to you who look for truth with singleness of heart: you shall see God. Good adventure to you who work for peace: you shall be called children of God. Good adventure to you.

What a striking hope from Jesus to his friends. That their lives would be an adventure – filled with meaning, filled with love, filled with opportunities, filled with laughter – also some lessons hard won – loves lost, sad farewells, failures faced, jobs that didn't work out, health battles, family conflict, strife of all shapes and sizes and variations – adventures in my experience are not using a straight path. Jesus never painted for his friends a picture of an earthly paradise, but he did set out for his friends a way to orient themselves towards what is good and holy and true. Our own cloud of witnesses helps us to stay oriented as well – people, living or deceased, who keep us grounded. We need these people to cheer for us – to correct us – support us – and to wish good adventures to us in our own walks of life.

We give thanks for our saints today. May their blessings continue in our lives. And may we seek with our own lives to be living saints for each other. We are so grateful on this day and on every day that God's love keeps us connected in this life and in the next.

Praise be the Lord! Amen.