

All Saints – November 5, 2023

Blessing comes first!

Blessings, blessings and more blessings

Revelations says Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom.

The psalm says I will bless the LORD at all times;

And Jesus gives us these at the Sermon on the Mount.

What a gift to those who need hope. Imagine hearing these words for the very first time – in the world then, AND, yes, in our world now.

I read a list describing the world then, with people looking at blessings as those who were ‘rich, happy, strong, satisfied, ruthless, deceptive, aggressive, safe and well-liked.’ Jesus is saying otherwise.

The beatitudes are not advice for successful living.... That is the thing..... they are more about consolations, and promises for what follows our earthly life and helps us in time of trouble. They are not a list of commandments but rather an awareness of God’s gifts, then, and now and always.

Matthew’s story evokes the figure of Moses. Both Jesus and Moses have miraculous birth stories. They travel, liberate and show mercy. On Mt. Sinai (Horeb) Moses receives the tablets; it behooves us to remember that the Torah begins with Genesis and God’s creation. Living **together** in God’s world we are responding to the blessings God *wondrously* gives us.

The mountain(side) is literally the place of revelation. For Matthew’s beatitudes – Jesus ‘went up the mountain’. There is great symbolism and expansive spirituality with a mountain experience. We sing – Go tell it on the Mountain...swing and sway.....here it comes (*sing Everywhere.....*) – (*I am swaying, Jake, and can not wait until you lead us in the song later*).

Notice, for a moment, that Jesus sits – sits to teach as the rabbis did in the Jewish tradition....this story comes early on in Jesus’ ministry; he was establishing his teaching and authority. He will present the nature of the life in the kingdom he proclaims and represents.

The people who are present, ‘the crowds’ – whom we meet in the verses just prior to today’s readings, are people who were ill, diseased, paralyzed, in pain, demon-possessed. Perhaps we might even say discouraged. Also present were the caretakers of these people, those carrying the burdens in the travel. They knew Jesus had healed the sick, possessed, and crippled. He had acted in mercy, WITH mercy. People were healed without meeting any requirement or giving any confession of faith. The disciples were slow to learn this. Healing Initiative and Grace came from the Messiah representing God’s kingdom, not a kingship, but a kingdom – also referred to as the reign of heaven.

So, the setting in today’s story is a bunch of pretty, sorry folk on the side of a mountain, sick and suffering. Jesus sat and said what no one expected him to say.

I have to gird myself because the beatitudes sound so close to impossible. I can take in one or two, but all of them. Really. I read it left to right, top to bottom, before the punctuation and after the marks.... Really Jesus? Yes, I hear you, Really, really, I do. Thank you. Blessings are here and blessings will come.

But if I tell you all the truth, I am glad my mother told me so when she was dying, dying rather peacefully and comfortably in her earthly life to the next. I have told some of you, that AS she was ‘traveling’ from here to there, she said, ‘it is so exciting, it is so beautiful I can not even describe it to you.’

And she was a bit of a poet.

But today is not JUST about Moms, my Dads, family and friends – or even All Soul’s Day, and the communion of saints, which our prayer book describes as ‘the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer and praise.’ – actually, the entire page, 862 in the BCP (Book of Common Prayer) is worth reading, today and often. (*Especially if you feel confused*). Today and the days since Nov 1st, is about what Jesus is teaching us in the Gospel, and what our other scriptures allude to for this very important feast day for Christians. Our collect tells us that God has ‘knit together’ (the/your) elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your **Son Christ** our Lord’. I love that – the mystical body. The Saints are mystical, especially from the 13th century!

Bishop Browning, writes in one of my favorite books, ‘A Year of Days’, that following ‘thy blessed saints’ is a ‘**tall order**.’ He describes the different ‘kinds of saints’ in different eras, from the martyrs of the early church, to the kings and queens of the medieval era, to missionaries, and to the newer figures who were active in the political struggles of their times and places.’. He further describes the saints as a ‘colorful’ company, but NOT a perfect one.’ Browning writes to ‘think of saints as sinless is mistaken’. They ‘grow **into** holiness, like everyone else does, and for some it is quite a transformation’. Even the process of ‘selecting them to be saints is not perfect. So who are they? They are people whom God loves. We remember those who became *translucent enough for us to see God through them*.’

So – good – huh? Quite a description.

Presiding Bishop Browning, who died in 2016, gives the community understanding and perspective.

Jesus gave the community hope.

Jesus talks about what was NOT. People thought that the powerful, the strong, the well-fed were blessed because of their material comforts – this is surely understandable when you are thirsty, hungry and hurting. And when you look around at power structures and seemingly unattainable comforts. Changing the value system, Jesus says that it is simply the other way around. He promised the crowd that a deeper everlasting comfort would be theirs in the *fullness of time*. The peacemakers, the pure in heart and the merciful would see God, be children of God, and inherit the earth. (his Creation)

It is a long shot. **Is it** hard to really believe it.... do some of you agree? But we can ask God to guide us in our attempts at kindness, goodness and truth. And we can grow in holiness – without being perfect.

We, in the Christian Community are to trust in the ‘communion of saints’, and the cloud of witnesses to help us. The presence of those who have gone before us is our prayers, especially the Eucharistic prayer, and in our wishes and prayers for those who are suffering, in pain and hurting...and in our prayers for our enemies.

On a small version of a short story, I can share with you that where I see this hopefulness is during visitations, with people who honestly share their pain, and, of course, in hospice. If you visit a nursing home, a prison, a mental health facility, a graveside, a war zone, sometimes, you can sense the mystical. You can feel, and hear something that goes through your soul, tickles your skin and confirms your faith. Something helps you keep walking forward. Sometimes it is a stretch. Other times, it is just **evident**. A presence, a power, a comforting and caring for the old and infirmed, the weary, the scared, the lonely.

Welcome these feelings of warmth and trust with yourself and each other during the Eucharist, as you come forward, approach, and receive. We will be the each others’ companions on the way. We will hear the words of the priest and be the witnesses. That is a blessing.

Although it surely can be depressing and worrisome, an outstretched hand that we see in heart-wrenching photos as people are being pulled out of rubble and wreckage is the example I use to imagine and hope and pray for God’s presence for Arabs, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Christians and anyone else in the Middle East and Ukraine and wherever there is misery. As Jesus taught, we are to reach beyond our own Christianity and reach out to others, to Gentiles, and different religions, so a photo of an

outstretched hand, with a prayer, allows us to do just that.

Jesus was a Jew. Jesus was a Palestinian.

Just water... at least give them water. Necessary for life. Give water. I hope that with next week’s baptism, we will all be attending to and praying for the gift of water, and new and unending life. Water is a blessing not to take for granted.

Pray for anointing. Pray for water.

Welcome the ‘communion of saints’ and the Cloud of Witnesses – because they know the truth of the Beatitude, and they they are with us, as we worship and as we move about.

For sure, now, in this time and place, together, we are blessings the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.