

Rev. Lynne Ogren
November 1, 2020

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
All Saints Day Matthew 5:1-12

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Every time I prepare for a funeral, I am reminded of my internship supervisor's warning, "Don't glorify the person, glorify God." As part of my preparation, I meet with the family and ask them to tell me about their loved one. Most of the time they talk about what they loved about their parent or sibling. It's what we do at the time of death. We want to remember the good things.

Every now and then the family will share the challenging parts of the person's personality, and sometimes they laugh about how stubborn they were or how they could swear a blue streak like a champ. But mostly, it's the good stuff people want to remember.

The gospel reading on this All Saints Day moves us to look at virtues as well as what might seem like deficits in a person's character. In this list, being sad or meek isn't seen as a weakness, but is lifted up as a way God might bring blessing upon those who are seen as lowly in the eyes of the world.

The Beatitudes are not a list we are necessarily called to aspire to. But they are reminders that God not only pays attention to those who are happy and well, God also notices and blesses those who are weak and weary.

As I prepared for today's worship, I spent some time remembering those, whose names hanging above you, are no longer with us, some only just recently. These beloved saints experienced the same joys and sorrows we all face in life. None of them were perfect, but as one spouse said, "She was perfect for me!"

This is how God loves us. God knows we are not perfect, but we are perfect for God! God does not focus on our shortcomings or our flaws like we tend to do. God sees the good in us, the possibilities in us, the uniqueness of each precious child.

So, I thought I might share with you some of the things I remember of our saints who have gone before us and the ways they were blessed by God.

Loyd Bowen was the first death from our congregation in 2020. For Loyd we could say, blessed are those who sing praises to God both through music and in the joy they bring to the lives of others.

Gentle Dora Morse was next. Blessed are the mothers—and fathers—who proclaim their faith in humble, ordinary ways to those who are closest to them.

Then we bid farewell to Frank Valach, a dear friend of this congregation—Blessed are the hospitable who welcome people into their lives with generosity.

Ann Carter was laid to rest just a few weeks ago. Blessed are those who receive support in troubled times and then turn to give that same support and encouragement to others.

Just two days ago we commended Michelle Hecht into God's care and keeping. Blessed are those who find solace in the company of animals of every kind.

And yesterday, two of our church mothers, Maxine Troth and Vonnie Ortgies, entered into the great cloud of witnesses. Blessed are the faithful, the dependable, whose steadfastness served as the keel to keep us all moving forward.

Maya Angelou is known for saying, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." These Beatitudes are not a prescription for how we are supposed to live in order to receive God's blessing. They are a word of grace which can lead to our living in ways that reflect that grace to others.

When we feel poor in spirit, sad, or insecure, God sees us and surrounds us with love and the assurance that we belong to God. Then, we can do our best to work for peace, to be kind and forgiving as God has been toward us. It's easy to become discouraged because the world does not often value these efforts. Our reward is knowing that God does value our effort and can take what little we think we can do and multiply it for God's good purposes.

We have been claimed by God, who declares us to be holy and beloved children. God glorifies us, lifting us up, especially in our weakness and self-doubt. Our thanksgiving is our lived response to this blessing from God shown in the ways we see one another through the eyes of God. Then we do our best to live into the kingdom way of life with the gifts and character God has given us.

With those who are newly baptized, Cru and Kit, Bradley, Ian and Madison, and all the baptized here today, may we journey through life knowing who we are—blessed and beloved children of God so that our lives give glory to God.

Thanks be to God. Amen

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Longing for Christ's reign to come among us, we pray for the outpouring of God's power on the church, the world, and all in need.

Lord of all the saints, we praise you for all the saints who have ministered in your church. Move the hearts of those who would hear your call to become pastors, deacons, teachers, and lay leaders to guide your people in the way of truth. Bless all who minister to your beloved children for the sake of the world. Gracious God,
your kingdom come.

Lord of every place, we praise you for all the saints who lived in communion with animals, with the earth and the seas. Bless the earth, especially those places damaged by fire and storms, that all creatures will live out your intention for their place in creation. Gracious God,
your kingdom come.

Lord of every nation, gather our country around a shared table this week during our national election. Open fruitful dialogue between people of every political party, place, age, and socio-economic status so that we may discern the common good you desire for us. Gracious God,
your kingdom come.

Lord of every blessing, your Son's blessing came to those living with poverty, grief, hunger, thirst, and persecution. Shape our vision of the saints to match his own. Awaken in us your call to serve all who suffer. Give wholeness to the sick, especially to those with the coronavirus. Send your healing power on those named in our bulletin and in our hearts... Gracious God,
your kingdom come.

Lord of every time, countless are the multitudes you have called by name and gathered to yourself. Comfort us as we grieve those who have died, especially our sisters Vonnie and Maxine. Bring us at the last with them to be in your triune presence. Gracious God,
your kingdom come.

Receive our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior, until that day when you gather all creation around your throne where you will reign forever and ever.
Amen.