

ALL SAINTS DAY NOVEMBER 1, 2020: God Sees You: Matthew 5:1-12 ·

What great prophets have said, may be forgotten, but what heroes and saints have done is still remembered. Today we honor all the saints, but especially the unknown and the unrecognized ones. Sainly people remind us that we too are called to holiness.

It is a tough time out there. It is only a few days before the election of the century, and tensions are high all around. Much of what is at stake has to do with the way people are feeling right now during this equally historic pandemic. COVID-19 has changed the way we live, the way we work, the way we look at life and relationships, the way we treat others, the way we look at what we most value. While many of us continue to at least adjust to minor changes, such as working from home, doing church in new ways, changing exercise routines, eating on porches, wearing masks, learning to enjoy the simpler things in life; for others, COVID has felt like a wicked curse.

Huge numbers of people are completely out of work and trying to make ends meet in any way they can. Retirees have seen their stocks fall and their savings disappear. Children are struggling for food and with school online. Many people have lost loved ones to the virus. In some cases, it has ravaged entire families. People live with a constant fear of contracting the potentially deadly virus, and that stress eats away at their peace and well-being on an everyday basis. People long for social interaction but fear the consequences. The choice between fear of death or hospitalization and loneliness or isolation seems an unfair predicament. Grief is rampant. And the fallout of a world in mourning has caused an already fractured nation to reel with unrest, polarities, and dissension.

We as a people are hungry for rest, change, and an end to all of this suffering and disruption to our lives. We just want it to stop. Jesus must have sensed a similar feeling in the crowds the day he went and sat on a hillside outside Capernaum in the fields of northern Galilee. Coming to see him were those harboring hope for something, anything to change. People were tired. {Like all of us today} Money was tight and work was hard. Taxes were steep. Disease was rampant. In fact, some historical sociologists believe that a virus had driven many from the area around Nazareth north to the shores of Capernaum and other harbor towns. Rome felt oppressive, and so did their local governments. Faith was rare. Revolts were common. Bloodshed was an almost everyday occurrence. The atmosphere was politically charged and economically challenged.

So imagine the curious and confused looks when Jesus starts to speak: “Blessed are the poor in spirit.....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 false only 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.” Blessings purvey a gracious, humble, and gratitude filled way of life advocated by the Jewish faith. To live a blessed life is to find a way to feel God’s face shining upon you even in darkest times. ***To be blessed is to remember that God is the source of all goodness and grace, and that God has His eye upon us, especially in our most difficult moments. That God is with us and will always be.***

For God never forgets us. God never forgets you. To remember that in the midst of sorrow is our most poignant joy. And our most heartfelt hope. **To be blessed is to experience remembrance.** “The memory of the righteous is a blessing (Proverbs 10:7).” Memory and blessing are tied together in a kind of unbreakable braid in that when we remember God, our relationship with God, God’s bountiful mercy and love, God’s loving care and compassion, God’s personal and intent concern for our well-being, we experience the joy and peace of God’s blessing upon our countenances. It lifts us up. Today we celebrate **All Saints Day, the time of year when we remember those who have gone before us, those who have taught us, been an example to us, and who have made an indelible impression upon our hearts.** We remember those beautiful souls with a knot in our hearts, for they have given us such joy. When we remember them, we re-experience that joy as though it were yesterday that we saw them.

Amen.