

A Sermon for All Saints' Day, November 1, 2020  
The Rev. Robin Teasley

*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."      Matthew 5:1-12*

Today's Gospel lesson is familiar to many of us. The Beatitudes are part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and in his teaching, Jesus is making us aware of a blessedness that we all have by virtue of our creation in the image of God. This blessedness, or happiness as it's sometimes translated, isn't caused by what's happening around us, it is within us. It is who we are because we are made in God's image. Our blessedness comes from knowing the truth that God is within us and is not contingent on any external successes or failures.

Sometimes it takes us some time or a change in circumstances to discover this truth. When we are poor, weeping, hungry, persecuted, or reviled we may more easily recognize that our blessedness comes from God, and not our circumstances. More often than not, when life is going well, when we are rich, laughing, full, accepted, and spoken well of, we can be distracted by the things of this world and may lose sight of the deep truth that is within us. We settle for earthly treasure and comfort, and we forget about the true blessings and inheritance we have with God.

Since last March we have had to adjust to some very different circumstances and over time we have learned to look for the true blessings. When we could not have Eucharist, we found Christ in the Word, in the prayers, and in service to others. We have worshiped in different ways; at home, online, and then some of us were able to return to church for a weekly service of Morning Prayer. We have learned that the church is not the building, it is the relationships we have with one another and with God. Perhaps more than ever we understand the importance of our church family. Perhaps this time of trial has strengthened our faith and has made us more generous with our resources and our time.

This year's stewardship theme is Faith-Filled Generosity. It reminds us that we are here because those saints who came before us were faithful and they were generous. Stewardship is the care of that which has been entrusted to us. We care for what we have been given because it sustains us and because we are thankful.

I think we've had a deep dive in learning to be more grateful this year, learning to adapt and change. We have become more aware of things that, before the pandemic, we never thought about very much. Maybe we took for granted things like family gatherings and celebrations of milestone events in our lives like graduations and weddings. We have lost jobs or continued to work harder than ever at great personal risk. We've had to grieve the loss of loved ones without the comfort of church funerals and celebration of life receptions.

We've had to adjust to travel bans and canceled vacation plans, and we've endured shortages of food, cleaning supplies, and toilet paper, for heaven's sake! We've learned that when some people hoard it makes life harder for the rest of us, and that generosity can bring joy and blessings. 2020 has been a wake-up call of sorts to

remind us that life can change in a moment and that we are not in control. This is something the saints of the Church have always known. Life is uncertain, it won't always be easy, but our treasure and our well-being rest in God.

Maybe, like me, you have come to understand just how important church is in your life. We are part of this community because we find something of great worth in this place. We find a divine presence here that is greater than any pandemic, any shortage of worldly goods, any longing we might have for the way things have always been. Contrary to what has been going on out in the world, what has been going on inside this place, even when we were not physically here, has been of immeasurable value, encouragement, beauty, and blessing.

You see, the church, this church, is a place where we know we will be drawn into a closer relationship with God and one another. This is where we receive grace and acceptance, peace and joy, comfort and hope, the Gospel and God's forgiveness. Those saints who came before us also knew this and it was their faith and generosity that have provided all that we are blessed with now. And the saints who will follow us will be blessed by our faith and generosity.

Faith and generosity look like all the faithful and generous things you do to make this building a church, a place where God's presence is experienced. When we have something of great value we take care of it. While we might be tempted to hoard it, we know that for it to increase we must invest it; we must share it. Our faith is our greatest treasure, it is more precious than anything else in life. When we commit to sharing our faith through our giving, our generosity helps create a place where we can gather to be in the presence of God; a place where our faith can grow, and – this is the most important part - where we can be equipped to share this faith generously with others, with those who do not yet know the love of God.

When we make a commitment to give of our time, talent, and treasure, it allows the Vestry to plan not only for routine expenses and ministries, but also for the future of Christ and Grace, for those saints who will come after us. As you consider the ways God has blessed you in this community of faith, I invite you to prayerfully consider making a pledge if you have not done so before, and if you have been pledging, you might pray about increasing your pledge. It's good to remember that a pledge is never about the amount; it's about the commitment to live faithfully. The future of the church is built on our faith and generosity, as it has been built thus far by the faith and generosity of those saints who have come before us.

Jesus' teaching through the Beatitudes are not so much about commandments or ethics as they are a declaration of divine blessing. They are a reminder that God's blessings are already among us, surprising and counterintuitive, gracious and unmerited, and we're called to live lives that are a generous response to those blessings.

That's what saints do - they live as if the reign of heaven is at hand, because it is! God has blessed us richly, through all sorts of circumstances, through all the changes and chances of this life. As saints of God may we continue to share the blessings. Amen.