

Good morning, saints! Everyone of us have been called to be saints and while you may not think of yourself as a saint, Christ sees you differently. Each of us in our own way have the ability to let the light of Jesus shine through our lives. And we are part of a great company of saints that extends through the ages. In fact, let's take a moment and call to mind that person or persons who first told you about Jesus through their words and/or actions. Can you see their face, hear their voice? Give thanks for that person; write their name in the book provided here. The Book of the Dead will be in the Lady Chapel throughout the month of November; writing that name is a simple form of prayer that bestows dignity and connection to that saint who introduced you to the Way of Jesus.

We'll renew our baptismal vows this morning as a way of saying, "Yes" once again to taking on our saintliness. As the old hymn says of the Saints of God, "I mean to be one too!" And if you look to the rear of the church this morning, you will see the morning sun illuminating the stained glass depicting the Sermon on the Mount. We hear a portion of that sermon in the gospel today that we know as the Beatitudes. Perhaps you had to memorize them at sometime, or have a devotional book based on them, or made (or inherited) a needlepoint sampler hanging in your home.

The Beatitudes summon us to a new kind of life, kingdom life. In his teaching from the mountain, Jesus is trying to help us imagine what life looks like when we live according to God's will and rule. It is a set of teachings that contains ethical instruction – some of which challenges long-held notions of right action. Even more, the Beatitudes overflow with promises.

Perhaps the major promise is that things are not always what they seem to be. The list of those "blessed" doesn't line up with what a typical list of blessed that we might think of: those who are mourning, or are humble, or extend mercy rather than exact revenge, or strive for peace rather than exert their will through violence.

In this promise and blessing there are also challenges. We've already named one – imaging that Jesus calls many conditions (often times, those we seek to avoid) "blessed." In addition, many of us tend to associate "blessings" primarily in material terms and Jesus' words stretch our imagination to see God present and at work in so many other ways, particularly in our service to others, and in those dark and difficult elements of life.

If I were to choose a word to capture the character of Jesus' sermon, it would be "*transformation.*" We are invited to transform our sense of where God is at work. Not simply, in places of strength, but in places of vulnerability – amid our grief, alongside those who exercise mercy and work for righteousness, and in so many other activities the world considers not just meek but weak. The God we know in Jesus always shows up where we least expect God to be: in a feed trough in a stable rather than a golden crib in a magnificent palace. The Gospels portray him among the poor and destitute rather than with the rich and powerful. And most surprising of all, he is found on the cross of an outlaw rather than astride the war horse of a conquering hero. Similarly, God shows up in our acts of sacrifice and mercy rather than through assertions of will and attempts to achieve worldly power and goods.

All this invites us to stretch our notions of what God's presence means. God promises not to remove our grief, but to transform it as we see in the resurrected Christ the promise that God's love is more powerful than death and that life will have the last word. What can feel like "small gestures" of being merciful in a world where "an eye for an eye" still reigns, or working for justice in a world where injustice rages, are precisely the places where God is at work—blessing, sustaining, supporting God's beloved children and this world that God loves so. In light of God's promises, there are no small gestures and we are reminded that nothing done in love is ever lost or attempted in vain.

Given the time in which we live, and noting that so many are grieving untold losses – of loved ones, of livelihood, of hope, of confidence about the future – this is a day where we can anchor ourselves in the invitation to live according to God's kingdom-ethic and allow God's kingdom-promises to transform our thoughts, words, and deeds this Sunday morning and always, for we are joined to all the Saints across the centuries redeemed by the grace of the God we know in Jesus.

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The Sunday After All Saints' Day 2023
St. Thomas' Church, Camden