

All Saints' Day is about remembering those who've come before us, those whom we love and whose memory we hold close to our heart. This remembrance is not a morbid reflection on death and darkness. But it's a celebration of the life God's given us and our hope in the final resurrection.

One of the traditional passages for All Saints' is the Beatitudes, which is a series of blessings Jesus shared with his followers, characteristics of a redeemed people who live in anticipation of the Resurrection, qualities which stand in stark contrast to the ugly realities of this world in which we live. We're going to talk about the Beatitudes this morning, about what they mean for us in our day-to-day walk with God.

OPENING PRAYER

READ Matthew 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The whole point of the Beatitudes is to illustrate how radically counter-cultural the Christian life is. Jesus preached this message at the beginning of his ministry because he wanted to demonstrate for our sake what this life looked like. He walked the talk, and showed us how God's presence in one's heart and mind may

affect the lives of the people around him, communicating to others God's grace, mercy, and salvation.

Because of time constraints I'm going to highlight just a few of the Beatitudes in order to bring this message home.

Jesus preached, **Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

To be "**poor in spirit**" means that one is humble before the Spirit of the Living God. St. Paul wrote, **Philippians 2:6, "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant...."**

Jesus was poor in spirit or humble before God that he might be like you and me and identify with our struggle. After all, what would've been the point of his humanity if he was able to invoke his divinity whenever he had a problem to contend with? Jesus was poor in spirit that he might embrace our struggle in his heart, that place which is filled with despair and discouragement, and then speak to us in ways which would lift us up.

Jesus was poor in spirit for our sakes.

Like Jesus we too are "**poor in spirit.**" We are humble before the Lord for from dust we came and to dust we shall return. What this means for us in reaching out to our neighbors is that we do not pretend to have all the answers. For example, when we discuss different church practices and doctrine we should do so with a sense of humility and gentleness.

We are poor in spirit for the sake of the world.

Jesus preached, **Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."**

Jesus hungered and thirsted for righteousness when he looked at the people who gathered around him and saw their pain and heartache, their pride and cynicism. He desired to heal every single one of them. He saw the orphan, the physically

abused woman, the man whose flesh was being eaten by leprosy, the hungry mother and her baby, and the proud ruler, and his heart swelled with longing to bring each one of them into God's kingdom.

Jesus hungered and thirsted for righteousness for our sakes.

We "**hunger & thirst for righteousness**" when we long for what God desires. St. Peter wrote, **2 Peter 3:9**, "**The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that ALL should reach repentance.**" God's will is to bring salvation to the world, so that's our will too. We do this when we share with others what it means to love Jesus, when we invite a neighbor to come to church, when we intentionally perform acts of service, and when we pray.

We hunger and thirst for righteousness for the sake of the world.

Jesus preached, **Matthew 5:7**, "**Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.**"

Jesus' mercy was probably never stronger than when he prayed, "**Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing**" (**Luke 23:24**), for he prayed it for those who were killing him on the Cross! His mission was not to condemn the world but to save it. He could've raged against his enemies, but he did not. Rather, he saved them.

Jesus was merciful for our sakes.

We are merciful like Jesus when we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44) just as he commanded us to do. It's not a challenge to show mercy to people who love us. But to be merciful to those who slander us, steal from us, and even harm us physically, that's another story.

For example, I hold no ill feelings for a friend who betrayed me, nor for a former boss who slandered me. My change of heart didn't come about because I'm a spiritual giant. For all I do is pray. Jesus does all the heavy lifting. When I pray, the Lord replaces my heart which was filled with resentment with his heart which is filled with peace.

When the Lord does this kind of miracle in our lives, we become merciful for the sake of the world.

Jesus preached, **Matthew 5:10-12**, “**Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.¹¹ **Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.¹² **Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in Heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**”****

Jesus was persecuted for righteousness' sake when he ministered to us in our brokenness, in our darkness and death. As we know, his persecution crushed him, and he died on the Cross on Calvary. But behold! On the third day he defeated sin, death, and the devil, and he reigns at the right hand of God eternally! He is our Lord! He is our Redeemer! And we are his disciples!

Jesus was persecuted for our sakes.

As Christ's disciples “**to be persecuted for righteousness sake**” means that we shall suffer because of what we believe, and it means that how we respond to suffering communicates something important to the world. St. Paul wrote, “**We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.**” (2 Corinthians 4:10).

Interpersonal conflict and humiliation, loss and heartache, failure, physical pain, and emotional trauma is the lot of us all. So what are we going to do about it? Deny it? Escape it? Fight it? Give up? Myself, when I'm discouraged and afraid I hear Jesus' words, “**Come to me all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest**” (Matthew 11:28). And immediately I feel a sense of comfort and peace sweep over me. And then I pray something like, Dear Lord, I relinquish my life into your hands. My body, mind, and heart I place in your care. Would you say it with me? (Dear Lord, I relinquish my life into your hands. My body, mind, and heart I place in your care.)

Friends in Christ, when we can pray this kind of prayer in the midst of our struggle the Lord helps us, and we become like little lights, reflections of the magnificent glory of Jesus, lights shining through the darkness of this world. When this

happens, then we understand what it means to be persecuted for the sake of the world.

The Beatitudes speak to our hearts. They tell us what we are not, but they also tell us what we are becoming. The Lord is transforming us from the inside-out that we might be like him, that we might be prepared to meet him face-to-face at the Resurrection, and that we might serve and love one another and the people all around us whom the Lord has brought into our lives.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this week may you know in your heart of hearts that Jesus lived the Beatitudes for your salvation and for your life in him.

This week may you be filled with the Beatitudes, becoming poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry and thirsty, merciful, pure in heart, peaceable, and encouraged despite the suffering you experience for the sake of the Gospel with which we've been entrusted for the salvation of the world.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this radical, counter-cultural Gospel with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.