

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 and one another.

## OPENING PRAYER

### MATTHEW 5:1-12

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

The Beatitudes illustrate how radically counter-cultural the Christian life is. Jesus preached this message at the beginning of his ministry because he wanted to describe what this life looked like, and then he proceeded to walk the talk, showing us how God's presence in one's heart and mind may affect the lives of the people around him, communicating 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, 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 for our sakes.

Like Jesus, we too are humble before the Lord. We do not pretend to have all the answers. When we minister to one another we do so without judgment, prayerfully seeking God's wisdom and counsel for how to speak and act.

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. 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 desire 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 bring salvation to the world when we share with others what it means to be loved by 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 that prayer from 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, just as he commanded us to do (Matt 5:44). 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, however. For all I did was pray. Jesus did all the heavy lifting. When I pray, the Lord replaces my heart, which is filled with resentment, with his heart, which is filled with forgiveness and 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.<sup>11</sup> **Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you****

**falsely on my account.** <sup>12</sup> **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 led to his death on the Cross. But behold! On the third day he defeated sin, death, and the devil, and he reigns at the right hand of God for eternity. He is our Lord! He is our Redeemer! And we are his disciples!

Jesus was persecuted for our sakes.

For you and me **“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 our lot in life. There's no escaping it. But we can choose how we're going to respond. Myself, when I'm discouraged I hear Jesus' words, **“Come to me all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).** These words are peace and joy for me.

Friends in Christ, when we meditate on the words of Jesus in the midst of our struggle, the Lord helps us, and we become little lights, reflections of the magnificent glory of Jesus, lights shining through the darkness of this world despite any persecution we might bear.

The Beatitudes speak to our hearts. They tell us who Christ is to us and they help us to understand what we are becoming through grace. The Lord is transforming us from the inside-out that we might be like him, that we might serve and love one another and the people around us whom the Lord has brought into our lives.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, this week as you reflect on the Beatitudes may you see the life and ministry of Jesus, that ministry that is our salvation and our life in him.

This week as you live the Beatitudes, as you become poor in spirit, as you mourn those who are lost in the darkness, as you become meek in the Lord, and as you hunger and thirst for righteousness, as you show mercy and peace and grow in purity, and as you find encouragement despite the suffering you experience, may you be lifted up for the salvation of the world.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.