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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church – Florissant, MO
Feast of All Saints, November 1, 2020
Matthew 5:1-12

We have a church calendar full of Saint's day. All through the church year, we celebrate missionaries and martyrs, holy archbishops, and great theologians. We celebrate those who gave their very lives in the fight for justice and we even celebrate one who is said to have slayed dragons! We hold these saints up as models of living out our baptismal call. And, Lord knows, we need role models. But it can be too easy to put these role models on a pedestal. You sometimes hear people say, "I'm no saint!" It's usually followed by a "but ... I am trying in some small way."

That's what today is all about. Today is not just about the well-known saints with colorful stories. This morning, we also celebrate and remember the ordinary people who have gone before us on the path of righteousness. We remember those who weren't perfect but who sometimes were just what we needed. We hold up the mothers and grandmothers, the fathers and uncles, neighbors and friends, those who showed us glimpses of the heavenly path. We celebrate that they now rest in the fullness of God's promises and that, in Christ, we are still one body.

The beatitudes that we heard in today's gospel can be kind of like the saints. We hold them up high, maybe too high. We embroider them on samplers to put above the piano, nice sentiments but not realistic for us mere mortals. Like the saints, they are lovely and poetic but not really for me. I could never attain that.

But Jesus isn't laying out a moral code that will assure entry into the Kingdom of God. The beatitudes are not commandments. There are no shalt or shalt nots here. Instead, we hear an invitation to walk a path together, to be fully alive and connected. The words of Jesus this

morning invite us to become the beloved community of Christ on earth in anticipation of the fullness of the Kingdom of God that awaits us.

In 9 short sentences, Jesus sums up the Good Life. But these sentences don't make a whole lot of sense when we first hear them. The poor? The grieving? The meek? The persecuted? Imagine what this sounded like to the disciples. Here they were, waiting to hear Jesus's first public teaching. Jesus, who Matthew called the Messiah from the very first verse of his Gospel. Jesus, who so threatened the ruler of his day that he ordered all infants boys of that age killed to quash any political competition. Jesus, the one John says is more powerful than he, the one who will bring justice on the wicked and set things right. The disciples were eagerly awaiting their Messiah who would make Roman heads roll and bring fire down on sinners. Jesus doesn't disappoint when he climbs, like Moses, up a mountain to teach them.

When this powerful one finally speaks, he tells them that the ones who are blessed, the ones who are on the right path, are the poor in spirit, the meek, the grieving, the merciful. He tells the disciples and he tells us this morning that these are the ones who are true citizens of God's kingdom. If we really hear them, these are shocking words for us. We prize independence in this country. We celebrate the ones who "pull themselves up by their own bootstraps." But Jesus tells us that, in God's Kingdom, power and might lie in our dependence upon God and in our connection to one another in Jesus.

This path that Jesus lays out doesn't take us out of the fray of daily living. It puts us squarely in the midst of real life. Loss is part of life and Jesus tells us to allow ourselves to mourn loved ones lost, to mourn our past mistakes. God is listening and God promises that one day, when the Kingdom is fully realized, every tear will be wiped dry. This mourning is not just an individual act, it's a mourning together. When the parents of 545 migrant children who were

separated at our Southern border cannot be found, we, followers of Jesus who tells us that those who mourn are on the right path, cannot turn away. We are called to mourn with them. This mourning has nothing to do with politics or blame or justification. It has everything to do with our common humanity and our profession of faith in a God who counts every hair on our heads.

This path, this blessedness is not a call to go off into the woods to find solitary communion with God. This righteousness that Jesus talks about is a way of living in the world as God wants it to be – an upside down world where compassion reigns instead of power, where mercy is the currency and peace is the aim. Do we really crave a world that reflects the love of God? Do we really crave to be a church that reflects the love of God? Jesus says to us this morning that we are blessed, we are on the right path, when we long for God's love and mercy and justice to rain down upon each and every one of us, right here and right now.

The beatitudes are an invitation to change our hearts. Jesus lovingly challenges us this morning, to equate blessing not with prosperity and good health, not with satisfaction and obvious abundance, but with the grace to be merciful to one another, to long for and work for justice for all of God's people, to be single-minded in seeking God's will for each of us and for all of us together. Blessing is not a reward for a job well done. It is not something we accomplish. It's not something the saints we celebrate today achieved. Blessing is the road that we are invited to travel together alongside Jesus.

Blessing is eyes to see Christ present among us. Blessing is ears to hear the cries of the poor, the sad, the lonely. Blessing is hearts that hunger and thirst for God's ways to be made known among us. Blessing is peacemaking, seeking our common humanity rather than seeking to divide us against each other.

The road of discipleship is long and winding and Jesus warns us that it may lead us to uncomfortable places. But the good news is that we are not alone on the journey. We are one with those who have gone before us marked with the sign of faith. May we remember them as we renew our own baptismal promises. May they continue to be a blessing to us and may we strive to be a blessing to one another along the way.