The Lessons Appointed for Use

on

All Saints' Day

Year A

RCL

Psalm 34:1-10, 22
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12

The Collect

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. ***Amen.***

The Response

Psalm 34:1-10,22

Benedicam Dominum

1 I will bless the LORD at all times; *
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.
2 I will glory in the LORD; *
let the humble hear and rejoice.
3 Proclaim with me the greatness of the LORD; *
let us exalt his Name together.
4 I sought the LORD, and he answered me *
and delivered me out of all my terror.
5 Look upon him and be radiant, *
and let not your faces be ashamed.
6 I called in my affliction and the LORD heard me *
and saved me from all my troubles.
7 The angel of the LORD encompasses those who fear him, *
and he will deliver them.
8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; *
happy are they who trust in him!
9 Fear the LORD, you that are his saints, *
for those who fear him lack nothing.
10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger, *
but those who seek the LORD lack nothing that is good.
22 The LORD ransoms the life of his servants, *
and none will be punished who trust in him.

1 John 3:1-3

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Matthew 5:1-12

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."

SERMON

Last Sunday, I ended our time of worship with these words from Rob Bell:

> **The Bible isn't a book about how to get into heaven, it's a library of poems and letters and stories about bringing heaven to earth now, about this world becoming more and more the place it should be.** [1]

Looking back on my religious education in the 50's and 60's, I certainly did not hear much about that. I did hear rather a lot about "sin" but "sin", as I was given to understand it, consisted of things I was not likely to do in any event, things like using bad language, killing people, stealing or drinking alcohol. Mostly, what I heard about was how to get into heaven when I died. Even more tragically, I was told that my behavior was my responsibility. I don't recall any discussions of of-

1 Rob Bell, "Everything is Spiritual: Who We Are and What We're Doing Here"

fers of heavenly help.

I wish we had spent more time with Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. To live a life NOW requires assurance that your Father abides with you NOW. I think my experience would have been a lot easier with that assurance of help. Let's look closer.

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

The assurances Jesus offers His Disciples are not for the lukewarm or the uncommitted. These are assurances for those who have committed themselves, heart and hand, to bringing heaven to earth now, to making this world more and more the place it should be. Jesus is teaching that His Disciples, each of whom will face the horrifying consequences of their commitment, will be comforted and strengthened. They will be given the re-

sources they need to go about the tasks given them. I think I needed to hear that when I was young. I would have been comforted and, perhaps, felt less alone for from the very first, Jesus told His Disciples that they are not alone and are not to imagine that they, personally, have the strength to go about their tasks.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

This is an easy one to misinterpret, but Billy Graham nailed it when he was asked what Jesus meant by being "poor in spirit". He replied:

> **What did He mean? Simply this: We must be humble in our spirits. If you put the word "humble" in place of the word "poor," you will understand what He meant.**
>
> **In other words, when we come to God, we must realize our own sin and our spiritual emptiness and poverty. We must not be self-satisfied or proud in our hearts, thinking we**

don’t really need God. If we are, God cannot bless us.

I cannot improve on that. It is the power of God, moving within the life of a humble, committed Christian, which works to bring the Kingdom. Bringing the Kingdom means, exactly as Rob Bell said, working to make this world more and more the place it should be. Such an undertaking is not going to be an easy, painless journey. How often have you spoken to one you love of the need to love your neighbor, even if you disagree with them, only to be met with a torrent of hatred? How often has someone you respect told you that the rioting and looting following the Black Lives Matter protests proves that Black Lives don’t matter? There was looting and rioting in Los Angeles after the Dodgers’ win this year. Nobody suggests that this shows the Dodgers to be villains unworthy of respect, yet when race is in-

jected into the discussion, how easily we change our perspective!

Even as late as my high school years, discussions of inequitable treatment of people of color in the here and now was nodded to, then nodded away as “political” so that the discussion could comfortably return to conversations with St. Peter at the Pearly Gates. Discussion of actual contemporary inequities was deemed too divisive and upsetting and so was verboten. It is the way of the world to avoid unpleasant topics. Do you not mourn the ease with which we hide hatred and disrespect behind platitudes? Do you not weep at the ease with which we construct good reasons to do evil things?

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Your Father knows your pain. He will comfort you. Or, did you think you could handle this all by yourself?

There's a terrible temptation in such a thought, one Rev. Graham spoke of:

> **We must not be self-satisfied or proud in our hearts, thinking we don't really need God. If we are, God cannot bless us.**

Confession of our weakness and insufficiency for the tasks presented to us is an intrinsic part of our worship for just this reason – to deflate our very human attempts to paint ourselves as righteous. Confession is our pride-killer and we need it, for we are a prideful species.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Meekness is not cowardice or shyness, it is that state of being mild, patient, and long-suffering, longing for righteousness.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for right-eousness, for they will be filled.

Our commitment must be fueled by a great hunger for

righteousness, but righteousness as Jesus defined it. Weigh for yourself the words of Jesus. How many clever conversations with St. Peter did Jesus relate; how many sermons on engaging in the lives of your brothers and sisters? How many descriptions of harps in heaven did Jesus relate; how many commandments of love for God and neighbor? We are assured that we will be filled in this task. Filled, we can go about our interactions with God's children mercifully for mercy is much in need, both in the giving and the receiving.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

It is in the giving and receiving of mercy that we go about the work of bringing heaven to earth now, making this world more and more the place it should be.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Sounds heavenly, all right, but the world to which we have allowed ourselves to become accustomed does not value peace. It values conflict and competition. It is our job to bring a vision of that which we have perceived – the possibility of living in peace with one another to a world committed otherwise. We are not permitted to be disheartened no matter how much the resistance to our example.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Our world has embraced every evil and made itself comfortable with it, so those who speak truth to power will soon feel the consequences. Nobody likes to be shown the error of their accepted way of living, particularly so when surrounded by like thinkers. Such folk will react with aggression.

Blessed are you when people revile you and perse-

cute 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."

The way of His kingdom is first and above all a matter of the inside - the soul. The Beatitudes must speak to your soul, and your soul must respond, not from some prideful assessment of your personal righteousness, but from a confession of your personal inadequacy. That, I suspect, is why Jesus began His sermon with an admonition toward a humble spirit. If you could do it on your own, what need have you of Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection? Today is the day when you assure yourself that though you mourn for the loss of the things you once valued, you will be comforted; that your heart's desire to live in righteousness will be satisfied.

AMEN

BENEDICTION

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Today is not the day that you resolve to begin living in accordance with the Sermon on the Mount; today is the day that you resolve to pray through the Beatitudes constantly and humbly, opening your soul to the impact of God’s love for you, despite it all.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Optional parts of the readings are set off in square brackets.

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