

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

All Saints Day - Year A

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Revelation 7:9-17

Pslam 34:1-10, 22

1 John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12

### **Gospel**

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew:

1When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2Then he began to speak, 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 will be comforted.

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

6“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

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

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

11“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The Gospel of our Lord

### **Prayer**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

### **All Saints Day**

Good morning! Today is All Saints Day. In the Lutheran church we confess that all baptized believers are saints of God. We use this time to remember the lives of those saints who have died, especially those who have died in the past year. It's a strange sermon for a pastor to preach, because one is never really sure how things will go. Maybe for some of you this is the first time you've ever heard of All Saints Day. It's something new, but not especially important. Maybe you haven't suffered any great loss in the past few years, and so it's just another Sunday for you. Maybe the loss of a loved one still weighs heavy on your heart, regardless of the time since their death, and so you find yourself dealing with pain you would rather not confront. Some maybe lost loved ones very recently, and the pain still seems too fresh to deal with today. And so I must navigate the storm, imparting the significance of this day in the Christian year, while helping some of us grieve appropriately, all the while making sure I don't go TOO far... What makes the sermon even more appropriate are the many terrorist attacks that have rocked the world and especially this country over the past months. Las Vegas still weighs heavy on our

hearts and then the news of the attack in New York was forced upon us. To make matters worse, I must confront the death of my own grandmother this past summer. Something that still seems strange, something that is easy for me to ignore when I'm so far away physically from my family and the reality of her death.

So what is the pastor/preacher to do? Well, they listen to the Holy Spirit, active within that pastor's friends. I received this week a quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whom several of us have been reading a lot lately but which was new to me. He writes in *Letters and Papers from Prison*:

*“there is nothing that can replace the absence of someone dear to us, and one should not even attempt to do so; one must simply persevere and endure it. At first that sounds very hard, but at the same time it is a great comfort, for one remains connected to the other person through the emptiness to the extent it truly remains unfilled. It is wrong to say that God fills the emptiness; God in no way fills it but rather keeps it empty and thus helps us preserve— even if in pain— our authentic communion. Further, the more beautiful the memories, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude transforms the torment of memory into peaceful joy. One bears what was beautiful in the past not as a thorn but as a precious gift deep within. One must guard against wallowing in these memories, giving oneself entirely over to them, just as one does not gaze endlessly at a precious gift but only at particular times, and otherwise possesses it only as a hidden treasure of which one is certain. Then a lasting joy and strength radiate from the past.”<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Letters and Papers from Prison: Reader's Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015. pp. 217-218

We do not wallow in the sadness or the grief, but we endeavor to let it be transformed into what Bonhoeffer calls a “precious gift, a hidden treasure, and lasting joy.” One of the keys to understanding Bonhoeffer is something we all must understand before we can begin to look at the texts for this week. We find Christ not alone, not secluded and protected, but we find Christ in our neighbor, all those around us. Those people, both good and bad, that we see each and every day. There can be no communion with God and Christ without communion together. We can’t do it alone, the very model of the Holy Trinity shows us that within the one God in three persons we are given a glimpse of a relationship that isn’t selfish, that sees the worth of all persons. To borrow from St. Paul’s language, when one part of the body suffers, the whole body suffers too.

So, when we look at scripture like the lessons we have in front of us, today it helps us to realize that we are called to live out lives that care for the other, that see Christ in those who are blessed in the beatitudes. In today’s Gospel Jesus begins what is commonly known as the Sermon on the Mount. The original audience that this Gospel was written for would have been familiar with Jewish language and would have realized that when Jesus ascends the mountain, something important was going to happen. Images of Moses on Mount Sinai would have been called to mind, even the Gentile would have been aware that the mountains are where the gods lived. So, this teaching from Jesus is significant, and he starts it with this strange list of blessings. The beatitudes are always a tough thing for us to hear, our man Dr. Hare writes:

*“The question of whether the beatitudes are best described as eschatological warning or entrance requirements for those who wish to participate in the kingdom is still vigorously debated. Are they indicatives, testifying to God’s grace, or imperatives, demanding obedient*

*action? ... We should understand Matthew's beatitudes both as expressions of eschatological grace and as implicit commands.*"<sup>2</sup>

You see, in our pain, in our worst moments, we can often forget about that body of Christ. When life can seem its worst it can be all too easy to ignore the Christ in our sisters and brothers. Sometimes we identify as those who need the blessings from Jesus, the victims that will see the kingdom of heaven. At other times we turn blind eyes to those who will be blessed in heaven.

But, if we take Jesus' words to heart, when we let the Holy Spirit work within us, then something amazing can begin to happen. God acts within our midst to make heaven known here on earth. That's the thing we always forget, and it's a pet-peeve of mine. For some reason heaven is always seen as some far-off place, a place we go after we die, as if this time on earth was just a half-way house. Answer me this then, why would God go through all that trouble to create the entire universe, the world as we know it, and then create human beings only to keep us here as some interim, with the end goal of moving us to some other place called heaven.

No, heaven will be something that is unveiled here. Revelation 21 gives us a vision of the new Jerusalem coming down to earth; heaven is something visible, here! When Jesus talks about the "kingdom of Heaven" it's the same language as the gospel of Luke who calls it the kingdom of God. It's not meant as some far off thing, but as Luke says, the kingdom of God has come near! Heaven is making itself known among us! And what do we see?

*"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the*

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<sup>2</sup>Hare, Douglas R. *Matthew*. Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. pp. 35

*Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying,*

*“Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!”<sup>3</sup>*

Wouldn't that be a sight to see... all nations, all tribes, races, peoples and languages gathered together, each a unique part of the whole body of Christ, petty differences and disputes put aside, and only the glory of Christ being made known. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> Revelation 7:9-10 NRSV