

Rev. Timothy M. Crummitt

All Saints Day - Year A

33rd Sunday of Quarantine (34th Overall)

St. Paul's Lutheran Church

Revelation 7:9-17

Psalms 34:1-10,22

I John 3:1-3

Matthew 5:1-12

11/01/2020

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 the Saints

Good morning! Growing up, my pastor began all his congregational letters the same way: “To the Saints of God at First English Lutheran Church.” It’s a biblical greeting, and it’s one that I have adopted in my own ministry. I think it’s important that we are reminded that we are Saints too. As Lutherans we have an interesting relationship with the word “saints” and what it means. In the Augsburg Confession, one of, if not the most important Lutheran document, is an entire section on “the cult of the saints.” So it can seem a little strange for us to have a day for all the saints. But the frustration in the early Lutheran Church was in regards to the pattern of elevating the saints to godhood. As I learned years ago in the Val Kilmer movie *The Saint*, the Catholic Church defined someone as a saint if they had performed three miracles after their death. But for all of Christianity, any baptized believer is a saint.

It’s a refreshing difference. The saints are supposed to inspire our faith, not make us think they were super humans who could do things the rest of us were unable to do. In a sermon on the Gospel of John Martin Luther said the following: *“All this stems from the old notion that when we hear of saintliness, we must look for only great, splendid works and gaze at the saints in heaven, as if they had earned and merited it. But we say that the real saints of Christ must be good, stout sinners and remain saints who are not ashamed to pray the Lord’s Prayer... They are not called saints because they are without sin or have become saintly themselves, with all their works. On the contrary, they themselves, with all their works, are nothing but condemned sinners. But they become holy through*

a foreign holiness, namely, through that of the Lord Christ, which is given them by faith and thus becomes their own. This faith is so strong and powerful that it covers and wipes away all sins and shortcomings that remain in flesh and blood. I have often said that the kingdom of Christ is nothing but pure forgiveness, a kingdom that deals only with sins and always wipes them away, covers them, and cleanses us of them...”¹

What a beautiful way of communicating the many ways that God has blessed us all. It’s a reminder that we’re surrounded by saints, each and every day. And in true Lutheran fashion, we hold in tension the complicated truth that we are both saint AND sinner, all at the same time!

Which brings us to the festival of All Saints. This is traditionally the time of the year where we remember specifically the saints that we have lost in the past year. Those people in our lives that were both saints and sinners too, who walked along with us in this journey of life. At St. Paul’s we put those names on paper doves and hang them in the center of the sanctuary. We add the names of friends and family who have meant so much to us, regardless of when they died. In other churches they will often light individual candles for those who have died, reciting the name, ringing a bell, and extinguishing the candle.

None of this means we worship these saints, but that we are thanking God for the time we had with them, for the blessing that they were in our lives, experiences only possible because God continues to shower us with people of faith who change who we are.

That’s the thing about All Saints Day. We often look backwards in time to our memories of loved ones, or toward the future when we will see

¹ Luther, Martin, and Ewald M. Plass. *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*. Saint Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 2006. p. 1247.

them again. We do this with the Gospel reading too, we think that the beatitudes are an assurance of things to come. But when we do this we are forgetting that Jesus is telling us all that the Kingdom of Heaven is here NOW! In this very place! Heaven isn't just some far off reality that we won't see until we die, but something that Jesus ushers in! It's important to remember that our Gospel lesson today is literally the first public sermon that Jesus delivers. He begins with these beatitudes, or blessings for a people who needed a reminder that God was continually at work in the world, working to change our hearts and in turn the lives of all of those around us.

God has shown us through saints in every time and place what the Kingdom of Heaven means. We see it every time we put into practice one of the life lessons we learned from the names that hang in the center of our worship space. Every good memory, every internal chuckle are signs of the Kingdom of Heaven. When we sinners show others love and respect we make it evident. It's this faith from God that has saved the world, and which will continue to change our hearts. Amen.