

“The Dead Are Made Alive in Christ”

Matthew 5:1-12

Today, we celebrate All Saints' Day. We remember the saints who have gone before us, and the saints who are among us. I know that All Saints' Day was actually on November 1, but this is such an important day in the life of the Christian church, like Christmas, we celebrate it even when it doesn't fall on a Sunday. It has such a major place in the Church calendar that there is even an Eve of All Saints' Day.

On the Eve of All Saints' Day, I was not surprised, but actually mildly amused at how many people were dressed up like zombies. Zombies are a very popular concept in the world today. Shows like the Walking Dead and movies like World War Z and Warm Bodies seem to be all the rage. I find it fascinating that our world is obsessed with the concept of being dead, yet being alive. Or should I say, seeming to be alive, but really being dead.

Whenever life and death are presented outside of the clear teaching of Scripture, wrong and even maddening views of reality can and will inevitably happen. Halloween gets celebrated as a day of death and demons – the horrors of hell manifested here on earth. All Saints' Day and the Eve of All Saints' Day is a celebration of the promise of Christ that He is the resurrection and the life.

So our Gospel reading is the portion of the Sermon on the Mount called the Beatitudes, which means “blessing”. Many people want to

make these into pithy little statements about how you are to be, and in doing so, will be blessed when you have the right attitude. There is a reason that this is the Gospel reading for All Saints' Day. This is not about anything you do. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The blessing you receive is from Him.

Look at the first one, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This is not you saying, "I have to become poor in spirit if I want the kingdom of heaven." This is not about what you do. Blessed are those who are empty in spirit. Blessed are the spiritual beggars, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Martin Luther's final words before he died were, "We are beggars, this is true." When you know that you are dead in your sins and empty with nothing to offer God, blessed are you, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Each of these "blessings" need to be seen in a similar light.

At the end, we hear, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" – same promise as was made to those who are poor in spirit. What is the fulfillment of all righteousness? Is it you doing something? Or is it you recognizing that all righteousness is fulfilled in Jesus? His Baptism; His cross; His death; His resurrection for you.

If you try to live up to being persecuted for righteousness sake; if you make this a law that you must do to be a good Christian, then you will have to go out and seek persecutions; and if you are really good at it, you will make sure you get yourself killed – for Jesus. Receiving the kingdom of heaven is not about what you do. These are God's promises to make you alive. You were dead. You have been made alive. You were empty. You have been filled. You will be persecuted. You are blessed.

Blessed are those who mourn. Is this a call to action? Are we to be despairing of life in this world? Are we to find no joy in God's creation? Is this really the Law of God that He commands us to fulfill if we want to be comforted? If we want the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete (that is the word there); if we want Him to come, we have to mourn? Scripture says, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice."

The Beatitudes are not about what you do to receive God's blessings. These statements are promises to you that you receive God's blessings, as a gift, by grace alone.

Blessed are the meek; the humble. Let me tell you how meek and humble I am that I may inherit the land. Haarithz in the Hebrew. "The Land" – this is covenant language. The empty and the downtrodden will receive the blessings of the covenant. We have a new and better covenant in the broken body and shed blood of Christ.

Blessed are the meek; the humble. True humility is the awareness that you have nothing to bring, nothing to offer before God. Again, we are empty before God. We are blessed because He fills us with His Comforter, His Holy Spirit. We are not blessed because we are gentle and kind. Being gentle and kind is a response to receiving the Gospel. Those who cannot receive this blessing are the ones who do not see themselves as empty and are trying to give something to God to show Him their worthiness.

We hunger and thirst for righteousness. We do not have it. We are empty of it. We are blessed when we are filled with it – we are blessed when we eat and drink of Christ who is the fulfillment of all righteousness.

You can do this with all of them. Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers – the ones who bring forth peace, harmony,

unity, concord. We have a Latin word for that: “Concordia”. There is a reason that all of our colleges and seminaries have that as their name.

Who is the bringer of mercy? Who creates in me a clean heart? Who is the One who brings peace, who brings Concordia? You are blessed because of God’s work in you.

Blessed are you when others hate you and persecute you on account of Jesus. We live in a “zombie” world filled with people seeming to be alive, but really, they are dead. They hate you because you are alive, and they especially hate the One who made you alive. Blessed are you. No sane person watching the show “The Walking Dead” would say that the humans would be better off if they just became zombies.

No child of God, who has been made alive in Christ, should ever think that life would be better as a spiritual zombie – they act like they are alive, but they are really dead in their sin. On All Saints’ Day, and on the Eve of All Saints’ Day, we celebrate that we are saints who have been made alive in Christ. Our Old Adam drowned and died in the waters of Baptism. We have emerged in newness of life.

On this day, we also remember the saints who have gone before us. They are not dead. Jesus says, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not the God of the dead, but of the living. . I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he dies, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.”

All Saints’ Day and the Eve of All Saints’ Day is a time to celebrate life in Christ and the blessing, proclamation, and promise given to you. The poor in spirit come empty before God; you have been filled. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. Amen.