

Sermon Notes November 6th, 2022 All Saint Day

Sermon Text: Luke 6:20-31

Scripture: Luke 6:20-31, NRSV

20 Then he looked up at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

22 “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you[a] on account of the Son of Man. **23** Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

24 “But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. **25** “Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep.

26 “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

27 “But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; **28** bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. **29** If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. **30** Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. **31** Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Sermon

All Saints Day was on November 1st. It is a day commemorating all the saints of the church, both known and unknown, who have attained heaven. The origin of All Saints’ Day cannot be traced with certainty, and it has been observed on various days in different places. The first evidence for the November 1 date of celebration and of the broadening of the festival to include all saints as well as all martyrs occurred during the reign of Pope Gregory III in the 700’s.

In most Lutheran churches, All Saints’ Day is celebrated the Sunday after Reformation is celebrated. In most of our congregations, the festival is marked as an occasion to remember the dead. For us, at Bay View, we read the names of those who have died from the congregation within the last year and a bell is tolled while lighting a candle. We also give you, the congregation, time and space to light a candle for a loved one who was close to you who has passed away. While the dead are solemnly remembered during worship on All Saints’ Sunday, the festival is ultimately a celebration of Christ’s victory over death. Death, Burial, and Resurrection is crucial to our theology.

In our Luke text, if you were paying close attention, you may have noticed that it is broken up into three sections. We have blessings, woes and then we receive instructions about loving our enemies. The format is rather simple but the sermon that Jesus is preaching may make us uncomfortable. In his sermon, Jesus is sharing with those in earshot about poverty, hunger, grief and persecution.

Today, I think that I am going to walk us through these three sections. We will begin with the blessings or the beatitudes, depending on the language that you want to use.

On Tuesday, we quickly looked at this sermon in Matthew. There are similarities and differences. In Luke, we see four beatitudes where in Matthew, we see eight. Lately, it seems like I have been giving language lessons in my sermon. By no means am I the language expert. I look to my colleagues who dive deep in the languages. While researching and leaning into their wisdom, the Greek word used for blessed is *makarios*. This word implies a person’s inner happiness. It is also important to notice that when Jesus is speaking he is talking about the immediacy of the situation; it is the here and now.

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When we jump into the text, it can be a real head scratcher. When we examine other Jewish Wisdom writings, we will notice that the Beatitudes are like congratulations. The purpose for them is to affirm, encourage or lift a person up and they are to be recognized and praised.

This may be tough for us to understand, right?

The first group of individuals that Jesus congratulates are those who are poor. The word that is used here in this text is *ptochos* and it references individuals who have been reduced to the condition of a beggar. When we read the Gospel of Luke, special emphasis of concern is placed on those who are poor. It is not limited to these four, but in chapter four, Jesus brings the good news to the poor. In chapter fourteen, he feasts with the poor. In chapter nineteen, we see that there is restitution to the poor who was cheated out of money and then in chapter twenty-one, we see Jesus praising the poor because of their generosity.

Then in the second beatitude which is often connected with the first one, the focus is on the those who are hungry. The promise is there that they will be fed. Then the shift is for those who are weeping with grief and those that are being persecuted. At the core, Jesus is sharing with his followers that his arrival ushers in the reign of God and the reign of God initiates a reversal of fortunes.

With this reversal, we then transition to the woes. In Luke's account, you can notice that they are parallel but they are completely opposite. They are perfectly matched up in form and content. In the past, I had seen them as misfortune. However, over time and more learning, these woes really point to a deep and inconsolable misery and with that understanding, it may cause us to gulp even more. However, I do want to emphasize that the woes that Jesus proclaimed were not a complete rejection of wealth. Rather, he was sharing that if you are fortunate enough to live into wealth, you are expected to live differently.

I am purposely not going to spend too much time in the second section and will rest the rest of my allotted time in the third section and issuing a challenge to us as a congregation while tying this text back into All Saints Day.

Following the woes, Jesus slips into the heart of the matter, in my opinion. He wanted them to know that we should love our enemies. Let me re-read you the last section and do so in "the message."

To you who are ready for the truth, I say this: Love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the supple moves of prayer for that person. If someone slaps you in the face, stand there and take it. If someone grabs your shirt, giftwrap your best coat and make a present of it. If someone takes unfair advantage of you, use the occasion to practice the servant life. No more payback. Live generously.

"Here is a simple rule of thumb for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you; then grab the initiative and do it for them!

It is not a stretch of the imagination to state that when these words came out of the mouth of Jesus, they were radical and individuals would have leaned over to the individual standing/sitting beside them and say, "that is scandalous." If they were sitting in at Bay View, in Year C, they may say, "I bet PJ will highlight our baptismal promise of striving for justice and peace in all the earth."

Jesus knows that we would have a follow up question. So, Jesus, tell me, what does it mean exactly to love my enemy. He gives us three very important instructions. Are you ready?

- (1) Do good to those who hate you.
- (2) Bless those who curse you.
- (3) Pray for those who abuse you.

Easy right?

[Type here]

Before you answer that, let me share some more insight with you. All of these imperatives are in the present tense. Thus, this is not a one and done activity. It is continuous. You are to make these habitual.

The last two weeks, I have shared about the tax-collector not retaliating against the Pharisee and Jesus not retaliating against those who had rocks in their hands and ready to stone him to death. Here we are again with the same message.

We are instructed that we should not retaliate. Even though we might want to seek vengeance, we should not do it. Instead, when the hatred is thrown our way, we should return it with kindness. When we are mistreated, we will in return give them charity and when abuse is thrown our way, we “combat” it with deeds of mercy. Then, if that was not enough, Jesus gave four concrete examples to cement his point.

I understand, this is tough. It is why it is radical and scandalous. Everything about this teaching goes against our natural human response. The passage ends with what we all have been taught about the Golden Rule. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Today, we honored the saints. We lit candles at the altar for those who were connected to Bay View. We lit candles in front of the altar for those who were deeply connected to us. I imagine that when we reflect on their lives, we can point and say, they were blessed. Many times, their blessing was in the holy life that they lived. During their lives, we were able to witness examples of them being ambassadors of peace and reconciliation even when they were not treated fairly. Then finally, they were invited into a life of holy simplicity, meekness and charity.

Do you see what this means (*pointing to all the candles*) —all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we’d better get on with it.

It can be a rough day. Anytime that we set time and space to remember our loved ones, it can be like a punch in the gut. For those of you who have attended prayer services or funerals that I have presided at, you will know that I like to bring out Bonhoeffer. Thus, this morning, hear these as you reflect upon your loved ones who are not walk with you on the earthly plain:

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 hold out and endure it. At first that sounds very hard, but at the same time it is also a great comfort. For to the extent the emptiness truly remains unfilled one remains connected to the other person through it. It is wrong to say that God fills the emptiness. God in no way fills it but much more leaves it precisely unfilled and thus helps us preserve -- even in pain -- the authentic relationship. Furthermore, the more beautiful and full the remembrances, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude transforms the torment of memory into silent joy. One bears what was lovely in the past not as a thorn but as a precious gift deep within, a hidden treasure of which one can always be certain.” **AMEN**