

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
The Reverend Barbara Hutchinson  
All Saints' Sunday  
November 2, 2014

Today we celebrate the major feast day of All Saints'. This is a time when we live more deeply into the connection of the faithful who have gone before us, and those yet to come, and also begin to grasp the enormity of the blessing of the saints among with whom we live, and move, and have our being.

It is appropriate on this particular day that our gospel story is the very familiar beatitudes. Jesus' inaugural address. Jesus' strong statement about the character of God and what it entails to be a citizen of God's kingdom. It's interesting, isn't it, we often think the beatitudes are about us, and we often read them and imagine it's some moral flaw we possess since we can't quite see the sense in celebrating our poverty or our meekness, and it is inconceivable to us that we would invite persecution into our lives.

The beatitudes are actually about God, about God's nature, and the path we can take to live into the image of God set within each one of us.

The reason we find it hard to subscribe our hearts to the words of the beatitudes is not because there is something morally flawed in us, but often out of a lack of faith in God's true character.

For how many of us, in our moments of poverty, have found a blessing in it? Do we really believe God blesses the poor?

When I began to ponder this question, all I could think about was a time in my sister's life, for a number of reasons, found herself in a very poor and desperate situation. She had been traveling to her home after visiting with us. For some reason her plane was so badly delayed, she needed to find a hotel room to spend the night with her 8 year old daughter. She went into a panic attack in the airport, for she didn't have the money in her bank account to do that. She couldn't feed her daughter that evening and she couldn't imagine how to get home. She panicked and thankfully called me and I was able to calm her and sort out some money for her to get home. But I have to believe, in this moment of extreme poverty on many levels, had I said to her, "now Janet, don't worry, for in your poverty, God is blessing you.", our relationship may have been forever broken. There was nothing about her life that seemed blessed in that moment ~ and so how can we believe, if we've ever experienced poverty of any kind, that God actually blesses us in it?

It is true that God blesses the poor. It is true that God surrounds and walks beside those who have nothing else, but it's awfully hard to believe it when you're in the midst.

For how many of us really trust and have faith that God blesses and is behind all the peacemakers, the ones our world doesn't recognize. Can you really tell me that if your son came home from school beaten, because he had stepped between a bully and his friend, and suffered for it, that he felt blessed in that moment, or you felt blessed in that moment trying to make sense of a bad situation for him?

The beatitudes are hard to hear because they require us to trust in God, at a very deep level. They require us to trust in a kingdom that we often only get glimpses of, through the presence of the saints among us; a kingdom where we look within, where we live into our spiritual identities, which at times, are in conflict with the identities we present to the world.

In Matthew's version of the beatitudes, this scene is early in Jesus' ministry. Matthew has set his readers up to know that Jesus is the messiah, so people were gathered and waiting with baited breath, to hear what his messiah-ship was all about. They were as shocked as we were at the requirements to live into the citizenship of the kingdom of heaven. For that was what Matthew was all about – the kingdom of heaven come near. How we on earth can bring in the kingdom of God, here in the midst of our ordinary lives.

When Jesus is aware of a vast and diverse crowd beginning to follow him, Matthew's Jesus goes up to the mountain. This locale in itself is significant, for all of the hearers of Matthew's gospel would immediately recall Mt. Sinai where Moses received the 10 commandments, or Mt. Zion, when King David ruled, and it would symbolize to them an ascent to God. Jesus went close to God, gathered his disciples, and assumed the posture of a rabbi, and sat down among his students, and spoke.

Now the perspective gained for Jesus by going up the mountain, would be very similar to Ed Friedman's perspective, another wise and learned rabbi, who taught a great deal about family systems, of stepping off the dance floor and standing on the balcony. You see things differently.

What Jesus saw differently and what elicited Jesus' great teaching moment was that he saw this motley crew of people who were gathered: rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, master and slave, and everyone in between, as God would see them: through the lens of love. He saw them all as children of God. This was a transformational moment in Jesus' ministry and it made him sit down and share the divine knowledge that the unity among humankind is way more important than any divisions we as humans can place among us. We are all children of God. We are all heirs to God's kingdom. There is a part of God within each one of us to be honored and celebrated and joined together so that peace and shalom may rule, on earth as it is in heaven.

Jesus went up the mountain, saw through the eyes of God, and saw his purpose: to draw all of humanity and all of creation into restoration with each other and with God.

And then he began to speak these words that still seem very odd to us.

Blessed are the poor; blessed are those who mourn, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are you when people revile you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

So let us remember, the beatitudes are about how God behaves~ and they are instructive about how we as citizens of God's kingdom are to behave and become.

It may be helpful now to look at the original Greek word which is translated as blessed in this passage. It literally means, "to find the right road". Jesus is calling us to find the right road.

When we find that right road, we are living into the beatitudes, we are being saintly, we are speaking God's love to each other.

You are on the right road when you know you are poor in yourself, but rich in God. You are on the right road when you mourn the destructive ways of the world and know that the story isn't over yet, that, as Desmond Tutu said during his fight against apartheid, "With God on our side, how can we lose?"

You are on the right road when you are meek and you make the choice for love and not toward gossip, hurtful comments, or violence.

You are on the right road when you show mercy to others. That's actually the easy one, for whenever we show mercy to others, the mercy and kindness within our hearts expands exponentially and quickly moves to include all.

You are on the right road, when we hold onto our interior communion with God and it allows us to look outward and see God's activity in our world ~ everywhere!

Matthew's Jesus today tells us to come close to God, to see with God's eyes of love out at the motley crowd of humanity and speak a different language – speak a language of love.

Today we celebrate All Saints' Day. It's a kind of reunion of souls. A gathering unto each other and in the presence of God all those who have, and are, and will speak love into this world. Love is more than an ideal or a feeling. It's actually a choice we make. It's a choice we make to bring in God's kingdom and claim our identity as children of God.

Perhaps Matthew's message to us is that we need to climb that mountain a bit more often to be closer to God, or we need to bend the knee of our heart a bit more often to listen more deeply to the truth and wisdom of God, or we need to make the choice toward love more completely, to see each other as God sees us. For failing to live into the beatitudes is not a matter of moral inadequacy, but rather a lack of trust in

God. A trust that God's message of peace and love and joy for all is indeed still valid and meant for us, all of us.

May we today be the ones to speak love to others, to bring the kingdom of God nearer to others, to be the saints who offer a glimpse of the glory and power of God, working within our lives, drawing us toward each other and toward wholeness. Amen.