

Oh, When the Saints
All Saints Sunday
November 3, 2013
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Texts: Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18
Ephesians 1:11-23
Luke 6:20-31

The saints.

The old ragamuffin crew, those stumbling and tripping, and barely walking, the beat up and banged up from the pain of this world, the, the doctors, the teachers, the students, the moms and dads, the business people, the care-givers, the service people, soldiers and protectors, the financially successful and the not so financially successful. The gay and straight, the old and young, alive and the dead—

All those who confess Jesus as Lord...

The saints...

Today we celebrate all of the saints, the long line of people both in the present and in the past who have contributed to our story, who have participated in the bringing of God's kingdom to this world, the kingdom of justice and mercy, the line of people that we are bound together with in our inheritance of salvation. We celebrate that today.

We read in Ephesians that we:

were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit;¹⁴ this is the pledge of our inheritance towards redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Friends, it is in faith, sealed by the promise of the Holy Spirit that we are called to be ministers of Grace in this world. This seal is the pledge from God that God will continue to work in us even in the mess of our lives and of this world. The pledge give us hope, and it is this hope that binds us together, and allows us to carry on in this world, that at times seems so void of hope.

This hope, oh saints of God, is the hope that makes us strong. That makes us able to stand up to the evils and injustice of this world and say- no more It is this hope that encourages us to say that a life of faith might just be worth it and to rest in our inheritance from God's grace.

This hope in Christ is what makes us saints.

This hope in Christ has given the saints of God their purpose and it continues to give the saints of today their purpose

We have hope, because we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, because we have been bound together for a purpose.

Sometimes this purpose isn't clear, sometimes and usually we don't get it right, but our faithful God reminds us time and time again how we might live together in this hope.

We read today the sermon that Jesus gives to his disciples after praying on top of a mountain.

It is Jesus that directs this call for the collection of saints; it is Jesus in his words to his disciples that we can find our direction. Jesus' teaching in the sermon on the plain first invites us to stretch our imaginations concerning the saints, those persons who are blessed by God. The "saints" include not only those spiritual superstars who attain exceptional virtue, do a lot of work for the church, have a full understanding of theology or say really beautiful prayers. The saints include people who are vulnerable; they are the people society routinely forgets about or takes advantage of.

God blesses those who are poor, hungry, sad, and even those whom society reviles on account of their faith. Then Jesus says woe to those who are rich, full, laughing, and well regarded. Finally Jesus presents his disciples with a series of directions: love, bless, and pray for your enemies; give freely to beggars, and treat others as you wish to be treated.

It would be easy to look at these lists and see a set of guidelines, as if they amount to a "to-do" list for disciples. I don't find that approach particularly helpful. Blessings and woes are not "how-to" instructions. Instead, blessings and woes create a set of pictures for us, an *ethos* that shapes how people are to understand God, themselves, and the world. It doesn't make sense to hear, "Blessed are you who weep now," and then find ways to make ourselves sad in order to get blessing. It does make sense to ask and respond to the question, "In what kind of world does God's blessing seek out those who are hurting?"

The things that Jesus is preaching about seems like a complete reversal of all the values we all hold so dear in our world. We try desperately, to avoid what Jesus says is blessed. Who in the world wants to be poor? Who in the world wants to be hungry? Who in the world wants to be sad and rejected and excluded? We go to great lengths not to experience those things.

And the woes he lists – aren't those the very things we want? Maybe we don't need to be overly wealthy, but we sure want a comfortable amount of stuff. Maybe we don't need to have our stomachs full all the time, but we certainly don't want to go hungry. We want to be happy, we want to have good reputations and we want to be included. What in the world is wrong with that?

What Jesus is saying to his disciples does sound a bit strange!
So, that is why we should not read them as to-do list.

Secondly, Jesus is really doing more than recommending values for our world, Jesus is telling us about the kingdom of God. After all the values of the world are in need of some work

I read somewhere recently that a baseball player's salary is \$26 Million dollars? What kind of value is that, when a baseball player is paid 1,300 times more, just for playing a game, than a public school teacher is paid for teaching our elementary children?

We live in society that most aren't willing to give all people the same civil rights. We discriminate based on race and ethnic background. Violence plagues the street and conflict resolution is avoided like the plague.

We do live in a world that has a lot of strange and mixed up values.

What Jesus is doing is painting "Kingdom Pictures" in this sermon - hoping that those pictures will have a "faith effect" on us who live in a world. These pictures are the glimpses of new creation in this world. The world could use a lot of what Jesus is talking about: "love of enemies - doing good to those who hate - blessing those who curse - prayers for those who abuse, turning the other cheek - and doing unto others what we want done to us." Jesus is talking to his disciples, to the saints of the church about the way God wants the world to be so those who confess Christ help bring these kingdom pictures into a fuller light.

These blessings and curses are indeed not marching orders for the precious saints of God, these are values of God's kingdom. The very thing the saints of God are participating in bringing to this world.

They are about how God blesses God's people - those gathered on the plain at the foot of the mountain, and the whole communion of saints - how God blesses those who are caught up in the New Kingdom that Jesus is bringing - how God blesses those who are baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit - This is about how God blesses people, in this life, with what the world can never give, and how God blesses those who move into the New world, the new reality into New Creation with faith that God has prepared for all of the saints.

Jesus says, "My kingdom is not of this world?" So, when Jesus talks about the blessings of God and God's Kingdom, we should expect to see a lot of things that we hardly ever experience from what the world has to offer. It is from the love of God in Christ, in the kingdom breaking through that we experience the forgiveness of sins, and prayer and care, and is in this love where we can, in this world experience grace together.

When we are rooted, grounded in the sovereign love of God, we are able to glimpse this new reality, a place where Jesus' sayings are not crazy ramblings, but wonderfully good news. The writer of Ephesians encouraged this new reality with the prayer that, "You may see this inheritance with the eyes of your heart." It is the inheritance of the grace of God, where Christ reigns supreme, and where God's people are filled with blessing. And such enlightenment of our hearts is meant to transform us to see and live the kingdom of God in

the here and now. As Pascal so beautifully expressed it, "The heart has reasons the mind knows not of." Hearts of faith see things that can only be a mystery to the mind, and utter confusion to the world. It is the heart that is able to see into that mystery.

People need pictures of what the kingdom should look like. So that we can go and do those very things: Love our enemies, do good to those who hate, treat others the way you want to be treated.

So people of God, Oh dear, precious saints of God, look for these glimpses, participate in them. Celebrate when the poor are blessed and continue to bless them, when people hate you, do not hate them back but know that your hope is in Jesus Christ, reconcile broken relationships, and bring light to darkness.

In hope, of the one who is and was and is to come, be a part of those kingdom pictures

So on this day that we are celebrating the good work of Christ in and through the saints of both today and yesterday. We celebrate the way God turns the world up-side down, the way that God uses these kingdom pictures for us to taste what it will be like when all the saints are together in the New Heaven and New Earth at the end of time.

We celebrate the faithful voices, lives, examples and love of all brothers sisters and eagerly await when we are all together.

God's Full Kingdom is near, live in this peace! Amen