

Scriptures:

Joshua 3:7-17

Matthew 5:1-12

For all the Saints

Last Sunday for Children's church we took a journey through our backyard wilderness we imagined what it would be like to be on a journey following a leader God had placed before you for 40 years. We didn't even journey for 40 minutes and we wondered if we would ever get there. We ended at the edge of the river and chose 12 stones for the twelve tribes of Israel and built our own stone monuments and ebenezers that reminded us that God is always with us. In the biblical story God provided a fire to guide the Israelites and Manna from heaven. In our journey Macky (now also known as the marshmallow man) provided a fire to warm us up and marshmallows to roast and feed us.

Last week Cameron and I also chatted about what it must have been like to be a leader like Moses and to be Joshua taking his place. A bit of an appropriate question for a day like all saints day one might think. What is it like for us to carry on the story of generations? Follow so many before us in the journey of life and faith.

It is easy for us to overlook the anticipation the must have been Israelites feeling. They had anticipated the fulfillment of promise the land for generations. We've only been in a semi-lockdown for 8 months and we are already dreaming of coming out to the 'promise land' - Whatever that might look like.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph formed their identities around this land of promise. For these ancestors, the land represented what the metaphor "heaven."

It was a destination where fullness of life would be lived and celebrated. For hungry, nomadic people, the promise of "a land flowing with milk and honey" symbolized everything for which they had ever hoped.

I still can't comprehend how devastating it must have been for Moses to hear the Lord saying, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there."

Joshua and the people would inhabit what Moses had worked a lifetime to attain.

Every time I hear the story of Israel and their battles to remain faithful in the wilderness, I think of our own wilderness battles. Although we know our culture and time is completely different, so much of human behaviour remains the same. We know how difficult the battles with principalities, powers and one another can be. That is one of the reasons we go back to scripture again and again so that we can be reminded, we have a God who wants more for us than we can ever imagine.

That is the message of Jesus who came to help all the world to discover fullness of life. God has a call on all blessed lives. In 1517 a monk from the University of Wittenberg read just that in his

bible. Martin Luther—discovered: In the New Testament, the word “saint” is used to refer to all Christians. A saint is a Christian and a Christian is a saint—one who has been made holy by Christ. At least that is what the New Testament usage of the term implies. Every Christian is a saint. For me every person is a child of God so All Saints/or souls Sunday is a day to remember all who have gone before us as well as a day to remember that God calls us all to a life of grace and love, wholeness and healing for one another and all creation.

Today is a day to celebrate that all of us are blessed in the grace of God. It is a day to remember those saints who are living now. It is a day to remember those saints who are dead in Christ—especially those very dear to us and those who have died in the past year. And sadly, because we are in the midst of a pandemic in the unbelievably challenging year of 2020, there may be more to grieve and remember than most all saints days.

So let’s take a moment to remember what God has for us. In Matthew 5—the Beatitudes. Jesus offers us a picture of those whom God loves, and among whom God is present, and through whom God is actively working, and thus blessing: the poor in Spirit, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, peacemakers, those who are persecuted for their Christian faith. We can add from the rest of Jesus’ ministry: sinners who are forgiven, those who are healed, the rejected who are received, the cursed who are blessed, the unclean who are purified, the salt of the earth, the light of the world.

The Beatitudes in Matthew’s Gospel occur within the literary context of inauguration of the new community.

Jesus has just announced that the kingdom of heaven has come near. The Greek word *metanoia* has the connotation of “changing one’s course of action” and “transformation.” Jesus invited the first group of disciples to take part in the new movement.

The Beatitudes should be read as Jesus’ manifesto for transformation in the community he has just inaugurated. The Beatitudes address those who experience various kinds of oppression as well as those who have been targeted because of their pursuit of righteousness. They promise blessings to each of these oppressed groups. There is a promise of reversal of fortunes, the Beatitudes do not glorify situations of suffering but announce reversal of fortunes for the oppressed.

After announcing the new kingdom and recruiting disciples, Jesus has been healing every disease, sickness and demon-possession among the people. The Beatitudes that come immediately after these accounts reveal how the afflicted and the oppressed will be blessed just as others in similar situations have been blessed thus far. While the promise of deliverance and reversal of fortunes spelled out in the

The Beatitudes are a deeply subversive text a context where the word “blessed” is often associated with the wealthy, healthy and the most powerful. Jesus clarifies that it is precisely the poor, the sick and the meek that are entitled to the blessings of the new kingdom.

But every time we read this verse most of us find ourselves pondering How is this true? how will the afflicted and the oppressed be blessed?

The most common translation of verse 4—Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted—does not fully capture the force of the Greek verb at the end—*parakleytheysontai*. *Parakleytheysontai* is derived from the Greek word *paraclete*, which was used in courtroom

settings in the first century Greco-Roman context. It referred to lawyers and advocates and has the connotation of interceding on behalf of those who need assistance.

Those who mourn will receive advocacy, not just comfort and consolation. Comfort and consolation are helpful and even essential but not nearly sufficient. Merely comforting individuals and communities who are mourning due to hunger, violence and injustice might address the symptoms of their situation but does little to change the roots of their suffering. As followers of Jesus, we are called to advocate on behalf of the oppressed and do everything in our capacity to reverse their current situation. When we see people weeping because of hunger, injustice or violence, our response must be followed by more than just prayers but with concrete actions.

One author suggests A literal translation of verse reads: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be advocated on behalf. This offer a promise of liberation to those at the margins of our society. The Beatitudes also invite and require anyone and everyone with privilege and power to participate in the process of making the promised liberation a reality.

But the afflicted themselves have an agency as well. Many of the Beatitudes place the second part in the active voice—theirs is the kingdom of God; they will inherit the kingdom of God; they will see God—suggesting that the oppressed will participate in their own liberation. Rather than turn the afflicted and the oppressed into objects of our compassion and advocacy, we must recognize their own agency and actively work with them to facilitate the reversal of fortunes Jesus has promised them.

There is so much for us to ponder in this as we ourselves live into a new area, a new life. It is starting to sink in for many of us leaders that truly life really never will be the same. We have begun to function differently in so many ways and much of that will remain. Still there is injustice, and inequality, and stress, and worry and concern so how do we live into what God has for us in the midst of that. How do we continue to seek to create God's kingdom come for all creation. What is God calling forth in our world and community today as we wander in this unknown wilderness time? Who today will be blessed in a God's kingdom kind of way? I invite you to open your hearts and minds today to discover where god is calling you to participate and know you are blessed today.