

I'm thinking of my grandma today. She died in 2020 but because of COVID, my family didn't get to have a memorial service until later. And by the time they were able to have one, Lauren and I had already moved out here to Colorado. We couldn't make it back because travel was still so restricted at that point and with Lauren being pregnant at the time, we simply couldn't risk it. So we tuned in online. But all of that isn't why I remember her today.

I remember her today because she was this petite Norwegian woman who was equal parts loving and sassy. You know, the kind of person who makes a meal from scratch and then proceeds to correct everyone at dinner, saying, "You know these are Norwegian meatballs because they're bigger than the Swedish ones." She was known by all of the grandkids as the "Cookie Grandma" because every time we'd visit, she would send us home with a Danish cookie tin filled with homemade cookies. And not just any homemade cookies – she memorized the favorite cookie of each of her grandchildren and that's what we'd be sent home with.

I would call my grandma as regularly as I could because if I didn't, the next time I called her she was quick to say, "Oh, it's nice that you called to remember your grandma." But as she got older and less able to go about independently, I remember our conversations often centered around her not being able to make it to church. And she loved her church. And I remember one conversation we had where she was lamenting not being able to make it to church and she said, "Well, it won't always be this way." I remember my grandma today because if there is anything that can truly be said about the life of the saints, it's that they lived from what they knew and believed: It won't always be this way.

I think that's what Jesus is trying to teach his disciples and us in this lesson of blessings and woes. Because the truth is, we live in a world that is broken. It's upside down. It often does not operate according to the will of God. We do not value or hold with regard all people as fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God. We turn inward and focus on ourselves. We have been convinced that the ultimate goal in life is our personal happiness and that blessing comes in the form of comfort. And Jesus is saying to us, "It won't always be this way."

Because in the Kingdom of God, blessing does not depend on life's circumstances. It isn't affected by the highs and low, the joys and sorrows. What you have or do not have, what you accomplish and what you fail to do does not determine blessedness. In other words, all the things we use to place value on a person, all of the ways we measure one's worth, are irrelevant in the Kingdom of God. Rich, poor, hungry,

fed, joyful, sorrowful, loved, hated – all of it only carries value in this broken and dying world. And Jesus isn't saying it's bad to be rich or full or happy. We just have to recognize that all of that is fleeting. And none of it means we are more or less blessed by God. Because in God's Kingdom, blessing is poured out generously, abundantly, mercifully for the sake of all who continue to live in the hope that it truly will not always be this way.

And it has to be the thing we hope for, right? As people of faith, we can't fight for the value and recognition the world gives while at the same time praying, "Your Kingdom come, your will be done." The two are opposed. For if we desire the will of God to be done, then we must see and know and live today with the belief that all are blessed – especially those whom the world rejects and treats as less than.

On All Saints' Sunday we remember. We remember the people who have shaped and guided our faith, those who have inspired us to live differently. We remember those saints who have died and who have gone on to live in the reality of the Kingdom of God; we remember those saints who are still with us and who encourage us to not get caught up in all the ways this world deceives us. For it won't always be this way. It can't be this way. And we can live differently, even today.

Because ultimately, all this world can truly promise, even with all of its comforts and luxuries, is death. That it will all come to an end. What is desirable now will not always be. What is successful now will fail. What has promised happiness and peace will become a source of stress and anxiety. Because it is broken. It is upside down. And the way to true blessedness is not in anything this world has. It's in the promise of God – a promise the world does not understand because it does not know or understand the power of hope. It does not know or understand resurrection. The world does not see how out of death, life can become more real, more full, more abundant. It does not know of the life that comes when all are made one.

So today is also a day of celebration. Because we have hope in the promise of God. It's a day to cast our gaze to what will be and to commit ourselves to living in that reality today. Because we know and we believe that all of this doesn't make or break who we are in the eyes of God. We are blessed. In life and in death we are blessed, like all the saints. Because although death is the end of many things, it is not the end of everything. It is not the end of God. It is not the end of God's love for us. It is not the end of the blessings of God. It is not the end for God's people. Death is the end of what was, but resurrection is the beginning of what is and what will be forever. For surely, it will not always be this way. Thanks be to God! Amen.