

Matthew 5.1-12  
The Feast of All Saints  
1 November 2020  
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The ancient Church Father Tertullian (d. 240(?)) gives voice to what Christians of all times and places confess: "All things, we maintain, are firmly defined by the truth of God."

As we celebrate the Feast of All Saints and the Commemoration of the Faithful Departed, may we bear this mind, and may it be our fervent confession and faith: God's truth, not human experience; God's judgment about things, not ours; God's Word, not human words—that's what defines *all things*. To our great comfort in the face of sin, death, and devil.

*Oremus: O Almighty God, heavenly Father, at Your bidding we have come into Your house to pray to hear Your saving Word, that we may obtain instruction, consolation, and refreshment for our souls. But because our hearts and understanding are darkened, and by nature powerless, sluggish, and drowsy to hear it, and our mind is weak to observe and keep it; therefore we humbly implore You to open our mouth, ears, heart, and mind by Your Holy Spirit, that we may rightly learn Your Holy Word, and with hearty desire, eagerness, and devotion attend to it, and from it learn to know You, and be strengthened in faith and godliness; that in the midst of all trials and needs we may have Your Word's powerful comfort in the face of sin, death, and the devil, until our last breath, and so obtain life everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.*

Fellow-redeemed: even just in the last 365 days this has been the experience of some of you. And for the rest of, someday it will be.

You've come to this place not on a Sunday, but any other day of the week. You're not in your normal spot in the pews. You're sitting right up here. In front. And the first several rows aren't socially distanced, but packed.

This day there are no sacramental vessels on the altar. The torches aren't where they belong, either. Instead, the torches are down here on the pavement. And between them, a sight almost too horrible to take in. It's a box. 79" long. 24" wide. 23" tall. Covered with a white pall. And inside it is a loved one.

Define that, if you will.

The loss of everything? God failing you—and your loved one? Curse? The end of it all?

But the Lord Jesus brings a different word to bear on it that you naturally would.

The loss of everything? That's certainly how you feel. But not so much. Hear what the Lord says through Job: "The Lord gives and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." For He is the only eternal possession.

A failure on God's part? No. For listen to what Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit writes: "For I am certain that neither life nor death nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Curse? Really? Listen again to God-inspired Paul: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.” So that the angel from heaven can say in the Revelation: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth.”

The end of it all? No. For the Lord Jesus says over the grave and casket of every believer, “This child is not dead, but sleeping.” And again, “He who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.”

That’s God defining all things. Even death.

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So what does this have to do with All Saints Day?

Much in every way.

For in this life you appear to yourself under a curse; for what you will be has not yet appeared.

That’s what Jesus is saying in the Beatitudes.

Would we say what’s poor rather than rich—that that’s blessed?

How about mourning instead of laughing? Meek instead of confident? Hungry and thirsty instead of full? Persecuted instead of cheered and commended? Reviled instead of praised? We’d hardly call that blessed.

And yet, that’s not how God in His truth sees them at all. Instead, whatever the world calls a curse for His Christians He calls a blessing.

Because that’s the pattern of the Christian life. First poverty of spirit here in this sinful flesh, then the riches of heaven. First mourning here in this sin-filled world, then the joy of the eternal comfort in heaven. First meekness here on earth, where you are but a stranger, but then perfect confidence in the new heavens and new earth. First hunger and thirst, but then the full realization of your justification in Christ. First persecution, but then a seat with the heroes of the faith in heaven—with Isaiah and Jeremiah who foretold the Christ, and with Paul and Peter who were martyred for saying He had come. First death, then resurrection. First corruptible, mortal life, then life everlasting and incorruptible, when what you will be *will* have appeared.

The pattern of the Christian life.

Nor would you expect anything different. For you were baptized into Christ. You worship a God and Lord who was first born in utter humility in a stable, only to be exalted to God’s right hand. Who was first crucified, and then resurrected. Who was first counted a Sinner for sinners’ sake, but is now the object of the praise of angels, of saints not only on earth, but also in heaven, who cry out to Him, “Holy, holy, holy.”

Blessed are you, beloved, not because you’ve called yourself blessed, but because God has. For all things, even death, are defined by the truth of God, who has also called you by the Gospel to the eternal joys of heaven. What you will be has not yet appeared to you. But it has to the saints who have gone before. So do not lose heart. Though you suffer much in this life, you suffer it in Christ, who is also risen from the dead. And for that, you are blessed. Amen.

*pax dei, etc.*

*jsb sdg*