

Lectionary A , November 5, 2017 All Saints Sunday
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, Indiana
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Revelation 7:9-17
Psalm 34: 1-10, 22
1 John 3:1-3
Matthew 5:1-12

Imagine

So, let's talk about blessings. Just take a second and write on the corner of your bulletin three blessings God has given you. Anyone want to share? Just call them out. What are blessings? They are good things God gives us, right? Did anyone write down that you are blessed by being hungry, or poor, or in mourning? How about being meek, or thirsty, or persecuted? No, I know when I count my blessings, I sure don't use Jesus' list.

This verses in Matthew are called the Beatitudes. We read them and make plaques for our walls with the Beatitudes written on them, but are these the blessings we are hoping we receive from God? Not me. I don't want to be poor, or hungry, or in mourning—and I sure don't look forward to being persecuted.

I believe Jesus wants us to see his words in a different way. The Beatitudes is not a “to do” list for us to follow in order to be perfect Christians. What if these words from Jesus are Jesus' way of inviting us to imagine what it is like to live in the Kingdom of God? That God's kingdom is a place where everyone is embraced, whether we see ourselves as worthy or not. That God's blessings are not dependent on our success or power or wealth, but on God's love.

Today, we are remembering our loved ones whom we lost this past year. And today, imagining God's Kingdom is very important. First of all, let me correct myself. We haven't lost these people. No, they are living in God's arms where we can't touch them right now, but they are near to us. When we remember them, we are holding them close to our hearts.

On All Saints Day we acknowledge and praise God that our loved ones are in God's care. Today, we deliberately acknowledge that God's kingdom is not some distant thing or place but it exists now. Knowing this changes us. It changes what we value in this world. One commentator I read this week says *“All Saints' Day is a repetition and rehearsal of the Easter promise that there is something more, something that transcends our immediate experience, and this proclamation is rooted in the confidence that God's love and life are more powerful and enduring than the hate, disappointment, and death that seems at times to surround us.”* (Lose, 2017)

And this year, it seems that hate, disappointment and death has been in our face. Our country and the world mourn the deaths of thousands who are victims of disaster, war, murder, persecution, poverty, hunger, hate. *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* We are comforted by Jesus' promises.

This week I was asked, “Pastor, why did Jesus descend into hell?” They were quoting the Apostle's Creed. When Jesus died on that cross, he experienced a total separation from God.

That is what hell is. When Jesus was resurrected on Easter Morning, he defeated hell, and death and sin. Jesus brings the Kingdom of God to us, not just in the future when we die, but right now.

We Lutherans hear and talk a lot about being both sinners and saints. These two things are total opposites. Sinners are separated from God and Saints are those selected to be close to God. Well, this is what Jesus does for us. Yes, we are sinners, but there is more. Our passage from 1 John tells us, *“Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”*³*And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.”*

Knowing we are children of God, makes https://youtu.be/N_lrrq_opng all the difference. When we come to the table today and eat and drink together, we are connected with all God’s children, living now here on earth and all those who are living in heaven. We can close our eyes and imagine what it will be like when we see our loved ones again. Revelation paints a picture for us. This is from the Message Bible.

“ I saw a huge crowd, too huge to count. Everyone was there—all nations and tribes, all races and languages. And they were standing, dressed in white robes and waving palm branches, standing before the Throne and the Lamb and heartily singing: Oh, Yes! The blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving, The honor and power and strength, To our God forever and ever and ever! Oh, Yes!”

This is our real identity.

Let’s take a moment to imagine.

(play *“I Can Only Imagine”*)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_lrrq_opng