

Pastor Jon's All Saints Sunday Sermon, November 1, 2020

TEXT: the Beatitudes in Matthew 5

Greetings to all you saints and sinners out there!

Today is All Saint's Day in the church. In the video, we just honored all those who have died in the faith since last year's All Saint's Day, along with the newly baptized. This brings up memories for me of all the saints who have influenced me and encouraged me in my walk of faith. I think of my parents, my grandparents, Sunday School teachers, former pastors, elders in the church, seminary professors, and my wife, Jeranna, and her family. Who has shaped your faith? Who are the saints in your life? Name them out loud right now.

I like Martin Luther's take on saints. He taught that we are simultaneously saint and sinner. We are 100% saint and 100% sinner. We are saints through our baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. We are sinners just by the fact that we are human beings.

When you think of a saint, you think of someone who is really good and does good deeds for others. We call someone a saint when they graciously put up with someone who isn't easy to put up with. If someone calls you a saint you might turn around and look behind you to see if anyone else is in the room.

Well, I have news for you. The Bible has a knack of lifting up flawed and broken humans as saints. I just taught the story of Jacob and Esau to our 6th grade confirmation. Talk about flawed characters and families. Jacob stole his brother, Esau's, birthright and caused a rift in his family. But God used Jacob to fulfill God's plan for the Israelites.

In the movie St. Vincent with Bill Murray and Melissa McCarthy, Vince, played by Murray, is a flawed character... he drinks too much... gambles too much... but he is always helping others... to his own detriment. McCarthy is a single mom who is a nurse. In a pinch she asks Murray to babysit her son. One thing leads to another and the boy picks Vince for a project in his Catholic school called "Saints

among us.” In his presentation he names Vince as his saint. He says, “Yes, Mr. Vincent McKenna is flawed, seriously flawed, but just like all the other saints we studied. After all, saints are human beings, very human beings.”

You might wonder why the Gospel for All Saints Day is beatitudes in Matthew’s Gospel? I have wondered the same thing. But it makes sense to me now. Jesus is teaching his disciples and all who can hear him who the saints are in his kingdom. Who are the blessed or honored ones in his kingdom? It is not who you think. We think you are blessed when everything is going well for you. When you have wealth and good looks... or no family problems... or health problems.

In the beatitudes, Jesus says the opposite. He teaches “Blessed are the poor in spirit for yours is the kingdom of God.” Or according to Eugene Peterson’s the Message translation of the Bible, blessed are those who are at the end of their rope. In other words, when you realize you have a poverty in your own Spirit, and you can’t go it alone, there is less of you more room for God in your life.

Jesus says, “Blessed are those who mourn.” Those who mourn are to be lifted up and honored in Jesus’ Kingdom. I know several people who are mourning losses right now in our congregation. Just the other day I got a call from a daughter who lost her mom to Covid. Jesus says, you shall be comforted. Anyone who is grieving is to be honored by the church. We are to be the comforters. That is why I carefully send out death notices to the congregation as soon as I am aware of when one of our saints die. We all called to comfort the bereaved.

Jesus calls the meek blessed. The meek can be translated as those who can’t speak for themselves or don’t have a voice. Jesus says, you shall inherit the earth. The Roman Empire dominated everyone at that time. It appeared they owned the earth. People had no say. Jesus says, just wait, you shall inherit the earth one day.

Jesus says, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you shall be filled. You can also translate the word righteousness as justice in the Greek. Who is hungering and thirsting for justice

right now in our world? I know from the news that our black and brown community is hungering and thirsting for justice.

It is surprising that we who are baptized are called saints. We already know we are sinners. But only by the grace of God are we called saints. Therefore, may our lives as forgiven sinners be a witness to all who think that being flawed doesn't mean you can't be a saint.