



**Westminster Presbyterian Church**  
Eugene, Oregon  
“At Home” Worship  
**November 1, 2020**

*Gathering Around God’s Word*

*If you are worshipping with another family member or with children, you are invited to have different voices share and read the various parts of the service. You can also call/FaceTime someone to worship together.*

*(If you have a prayer request you would like added to the At-Home Worship service, please email [Brooke.office@wpceugene.org](mailto:Brooke.office@wpceugene.org))*

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

O taste and see that the Lord is good:  
**happy are those who take refuge in God.**  
With hearts and hands and voices,  
**let us praise the Lord**

**OPENING HYMN**

*For All the Saints*

*#326*

**CALL TO CONFESSION**

In the face of God’s goodness we recognize our failings. Hungry for God’s mercy, let us tell the truth about our lives, that we might receive grace in time of need.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

**Gracious God, you call us your own children and cover us with love. We would seek to be merciful as you are, and to show compassion as you do, but we fail to live the life to which we have been called. Where we ought to forgive, we condemn; the evil we should shun, we embrace. Forgive our sinful ways and make us more like Christ, until we are raised in perfection on the last day. Amen.**

## DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Sisters and brothers, no one who takes refuge in God will be condemned. Believe the good news! In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

*The Word*

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

In your Word, O God, show us heaven. By your Spirit, show us truth; through Christ the Living Word, in whom we see your face. Amen.

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

*Old Testament Reading: Psalm 34:1-10*

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, and he answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. Look to him, and be radiant; so your faces shall never be ashamed. This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD, and was saved from every trouble. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him. O fear the LORD, you his holy ones, for those who fear him have no want. The young lions suffer want and hunger, but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

*New Testament Reading: Matthew 5:1-12*

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

SERMON

"How the Saints Can Help Us"

Rev. David Ukropina

One of the things I usually try to do with sermons is to have a central focus. That doesn't mean the whole sermon has to be in lock-step around only one idea, but I do this because I think it makes sermons easier to follow and pay attention to, as opposed to ones that are really scattered and talk about a million different things.

At the same time, sometimes my central focus combines a few different elements, even as I try to keep things centered on the way these elements come together. That's how it is for today's sermon, where the focus is upon the way that our lectionary text on the Beatitudes connects with the theme of All Saints Sunday.

Today is one of those Sundays where All Saints day, or November 1, actually lands on a Sunday, something that usually doesn't happen. And as I've mentioned, our gospel lectionary passage is from Matthew chapter five, starting with verse one, which is the start of the famous Sermon on the Mount, which contains the Beatitudes.

Now as we know, the Beatitudes are a famous part of the Bible, of the gospels, and of Jesus ministry. In the comic film Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*, there's a moment where Jesus is giving the Sermon on the Mount, but some of the crowd can't hear him very well. One woman keeps saying things like, "Why will the Greek inherit the earth?", and "Why did he say blessed are the cheesemakers?"

We all get the jokes simply because the Sermon on the Mount is so well known. The Beatitudes have been with us for two thousand years, and are such a central part of western culture and even world culture that just about everyone, Christian or not, has some familiarity with them.

This creates a problem, however, because it dilutes some of the power and some of the radical surprise of the Beatitudes. We have a habit of seeing these lines from Jesus as little sayings of wisdom that we can use to better our lives. If we just go out and do what Jesus teaches, we'll be better off.

But not only is the lack of surprise problematic, because it has worn off some of the shock we should hear, but it also misses the fact that these Beatitudes really aren't commands from Jesus. Jesus doesn't say "If you want to be happy, do this." The Beatitudes aren't formulas for better living.

Instead, Jesus says blessed are the meek, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the peacemakers. He is simply stating a reality. This is how it is, Jesus says. It's not a command to be meek, or to be in mourning, or to be persecuted. He simply says that when you are these things, you are blessed.

The word blessed has a long tradition in the Old Testament, and one traditional sense of the word is to mean "on the right road" or "on the right path." You are blessed, you are on the right road, when you are these things Jesus describes. It's not so much a feeling of happiness, as it is a feeling of rightness.

Now when you look at the things that Jesus calls right, that is where the shock comes in. They are incredibly counter to how this world values things. This world values power and strength and domination. Jesus instead lifts up meekness and mourning and peace and those who hunger for righteousness.

There's no doubt that those in the audience listening to Jesus would have been upset to hear these things. For them, the kingdom means a much different thing than what Jesus means by the kingdom. For them, the kingdom is full of triumph and war chariots and blowing trumpets

and domineering power.

For centuries, a tradition had grown in Israel of the messiah as a conquering hero, some kind of combination of King David on the throne, which was the political high-water mark of Israel, and Elijah, a powerful prophet calling people to repentance. John the Baptist told them the messiah would come with his winnowing fork to clear threshing floor and burn the chaff with fire.

The people of Israel were expecting a messiah with enough power to violently drive out the hated Romans and aggressively establish justice in the land. By the time Jesus showed up, they were in a fever pitch to rebel and fight back. Even a few decades after Jesus, this messianic fever would lead to the revolt that would result in the Romans destroying Jerusalem.

But instead of the violent messiah, the people get Jesus, who is very different than this image they were expecting. This is why John the Baptist wonders from prison if Jesus is the messiah, and why Peter rejects Jesus when he learns that the messiah must suffer and be killed on the cross.

And if we're honest, we can be this way too, both in society and in churches. In society, people flock to the strong, the powerful, the bold, people that can make things happen. In church too, parishioners can prefer big, powerful, often male egos that can dominate and make their church bigger and more powerful than the other churches.

Instead of the way the world works, we get Jesus, who instead of lifting up the powerful and the dominant and the strong, lifts up the poor in spirit, the meek and those who mourn. This is an incredible reversal, one we have to work at a bit to pull out of our familiarity which can dull the shocking reversal that it is.

And if we think about it, the Beatitudes continue to challenge and puzzle us, rather than staying in a neatly bound package of wisdom. I mean, wouldn't we rather be strong in spirit rather than poor in spirit? Wouldn't we rather rejoice than mourn? There continues to be a confounding aspect to the Beatitudes even after all this time.

But if you look at the portrait that the Beatitudes portray, it really looks like Jesus himself. Who do we know that was meek, and who suffered persecution for righteousness, who was a peacemaker, and who mourned? That portrait looks a lot like Jesus himself. And let's look for a minute at the opposite portrait.

When we think about the opposite image of the Beatitudes, what does it portray? It creates a picture of someone or of people who are angry, mean, cruel, resentful, petty, arrogant, full of bluster, the loud, the noisy, the brash. Again, we can say we don't want this as churches, but look at how many ministers and preachers that have fit that description. I can definitely think of more than a few.

We continue to be shocked by the Beatitudes because they are so counter to how the world works. We still don't quite understand how its good to be poor in spirit, mourning, weary. The great Christian philosopher Blaise Pascal helped me with this when he said "It is good to be weary and worn out...so that we may open our arms to the redeemer!"

When we begin to think about how the Beatitudes connect with All Saints Day, the connection I start thinking about is the kingdom of God. When Jesus is presenting the Beatitudes, he is conveying what the kingdom is like, and the nature of citizenship within the kingdom. That is how these gospel passages help give us an understanding of what sainthood and the communion of saints is like.

I'm sure you are a bit like me in being able to picture people you have met during your life that make you think of these qualities. I think of my friend Beth Rettig, who visited people who were sick and tended to them. I think of Louis Bradley, a member at the first church I attended, who in his 80's started writing little notes of encouragement to people, just out of the blue.

I think of pastors I know, many of whom are struggling like everyone else with the pandemic and who are fatigued and weary, but still continue to minister as best they can. I think of people who have had awful things happen to them, but still find a way to live in hope and live in faith.

One of the things I've noticed about Westminster is that it has a lot of geographic diversity. People here have come from a lot of different places around the country and even the world, and I think that trend has even increased in the time we've been here, and that's a trend I like because it creates a lot of geographic diversity.

As I think about that, it makes me think of all those saints around the country and around the world who helped and nurtured the faith of parishioners here. I think of those saints who have been quiet and humble, generous and gracious, and have helped develop and encourage the lives of current parishioners through their faith life.

And as I think about the "so what?" question which I often ask, the question of how all this relates to our life, I think about all the ways the saints who have gone before us can help us. This is true in all times, but I think about it especially during this pandemic, when so many of us are weary and trying to find our way through.

The pandemic has created many separations between people, loved ones who cannot hug grandchildren or visit family members who are in the hospital or receiving care somewhere. The pandemic has made all of us more isolated and more fatigued, even as we work hard to stay connected with one another.

And at a time when we are more distant from one another, it can help on a day like All Saints Day to remember the communion of saints, and how the saints across all times and places are spiritually with us in a mysterious and transcendent way, all around the country and all around the world.

Thinking about and praying about and remembering these saints can help lift us up in any time, but especially when we may be feeling lonely or weary or separated. They are with us in the same mysterious way that Jesus is with us and the Holy Spirit is with us, transcending time and place.

Not only can that remembrance help us, but it can also help us to remember the specific quality of the saints, as lifted up by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and the Beatitudes. In this

loud, contentious political season, when there is so much anger and noise, it helps us to reflect upon and give thanks to those who are good and decent and kind.

That helpfulness ultimately does not come from the saints themselves, but from the way they reflect the qualities of Jesus, who was himself good and decent and kind, a man well acquainted with sorrow, but who transcended the persecution and suffering of this world to show us a better way, rooted in his love, peace and grace. Amen.

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH – Apostles Creed

**I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.**

*Responding to God's Word*

#### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER**

Eternal God of our past and our future, we bring before you our joys and concerns, knowing you hear our prayers....

We pray today for those whom Jesus called blessed:

for the poor in spirit...for those who mourn...for the humble and meek...for those who thirst and hunger for righteousness...for the pure in heart...for those who show mercy and those who make peace...for those persecuted because of Christ...

Pour out your blessings upon them and us that we may be strengthened in every hardship and joyful at every blessing...

We call to mind before you all those who have died:

those who taught us the faith...those who spoke your truth in the face of evil...those who cared for the weak and the suffering...and those whom we loved and cherished the most...Thank you that their pain is ended and their joy made complete.

Loving God, in baptism you claim us and show us how to live. Keep us in your care until that day when all creation sings your praise and you lead all your children to the springs of the water of life. Through Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Lord, who taught us to pray, saying... **Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.**

*Sending of God's Word*

CLOSING HYMN

*Blest Are They*

#172

BENEDICTION

And now may the Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other.

-Genesis, 31:49