

November 5, 2017  
All Saints Sunday  
Revelation 7:9-17; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12  
For All the Saints  
The Rev. Dorothy Cottingham  
Christ the King Lutheran Church, Tigard, OR

Fellow Ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ,  
Gracia y paz del Dio; Padre, Hijo e Espíritu Santo  
Grace to you and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Kristine, an inquisitive and thoughtful child asked her mother, “why are we here?” Without hesitation, my sister, Gretchen answered her then five-year-old daughter. “To love and praise God!”

45 years later Gretchen was pondering what scripture to include in her imminent memorial service. Again, without hesitation she chose Philippians 4, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.” In spite of her physical ordeals, Multiple Sclerosis and cancer; she was quick to remind anyone who would pity her that she was blessed. Not in the way the world counts blessings. But in the radical way that Jesus invites us to count blessings.

What we hear Jesus saying today is foolishness to our 21<sup>st</sup> century ears. Just as it sounded foolish to those who heard it the first time. To be blessed is to be in favor with God. Not because of anything we do or have, only because God loves us

The poor in spirit are blessed. Jesus is not speaking of economic deprivation. He speaks of a deep acknowledgment of our spiritual dependency on God.

Those who mourn are blessed. Not only those who seek comfort at the loss of a loved one. But, also those who experience a broader sense of grief. Grief over the wrongs and sufferings of the world. The meek are blessed. What is meekness? A doormat? A wallflower? No! Meekness is quiet, gentle, obedient service to God’s will. To be meek is to humble OUR will to GOD’S will for the world. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness are blessed. Those who hunger and thirst after God’s will for justice on the earth. Those who seek justice for the poor, sick and alone are blessed. The merciful are blessed with mercy to give to others. All who receive God’s mercy are compelled to give mercy to others. God’s mercy is for everyone! The pure in heart are blessed. Those who seek God’s will for creation will see God...now...today.

The peacemakers are blessed. Those who seek to bring about reconciliation are blessed. Those who work to heal brokenness wherever they see it will be called the children of God. Even the peaceful protesters on the streets of Portland are peacemakers. Peace is the nature of God’s work in the world. God’s favor, blessing, is freely given to all who are persecuted because they are loyal to God’s rule.

The Beatitudes redefine the worldly understanding of what it means to be blessed. The world counts its blessings by measuring its wealth and possessions. It is all too easy to become distracted by the siren call of merit-based blessing. But God calls us back with this litany of God’s steadfastness – this reminder of God’s unbroken covenant relationship with all of creation.

It is true, we face enormous struggles and dangers in this world. War, dangerous weather, hatred, political systems that favor some and toss others aside, individual leaders who are deaf to the cries of the people and economic systems that oppress the vulnerable. We are no better, no wiser, no more civilized, and no more compassionate in this century than the first hearers of Jesus words. To believe that we are is foolishness.

Yet, Jesus calls us to be fools for the gospel. Jesus calls us to advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves. Jesus calls us to be the peacemakers and the merciful. It is hard work.

But God has blessed us. And if WE get to receive God's favor, free of charge, then we must stand up to the Empire, the system that denies favor to some. That is why we say, black lives matter, immigrant lives matter, women's lives matter, LGBTQ lives matter, drug addict lives matter, the list is endless.

We are called to be allies with those who have no place at the table.

Blessed be God that have a place at this table where Jesus comes to us in the bread and wine filling us with God's justice, mercy and humility. Today, we honor Gretchen and all the saints who in one way or another understood their purpose on earth. Imagine that great cloud of witnesses from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne of the Lamb, robed in white, waving palm branches as you listen again to this soaring text, this revelation, this awe-inspiring promise from God,

<sup>9</sup>After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup>They cried out in a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" <sup>11</sup>And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>12</sup>singing,

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

<sup>13</sup>Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" <sup>14</sup>I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup>For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. <sup>16</sup>They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; <sup>17</sup>for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+7%3A9-17&version=NRSV>)

This vision, revealed to John is the reality that awaits us. And while we wait we love and praise God with daily acts of justice, mercy and peace in a world that persecutes and reviles those who claim the blessings of God.

Don't give up! Rejoice and be glad! Your reward is already here. And it is eternal!

Thanks be to God!