

*November 6, 2022*

*All Saints' Day*

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The blessings and the woe's – a familiar text

We heard it earlier this year in the season of Epiphany and hearing it again reminds us of it's "cousin" text which is a bit more well known: The Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."

"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled."

"Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven"

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation."

"Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry."

"Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep."

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets."

I don't know about you but reading this text can make me feel like the flag in the middle of a tug-o-war rope being pushed and pulled from one side to the other

"Blessed!" "Woe!" "Blessed!" "Woe!"

Rarely in our lives do we reside solely at one of those poles – only poor our whole life or only rich, only hungry or only full, only grieving or only laughing

Throughout life we go back and forth, pushed and pulled

We can feel so rattled when we read or hear this text

What does this text have to do with All Saints' Day?

What even is a saint? Perhaps we need to start there – at the basics!

The glossary on the Episcopal Church's website defines a Saint as "A holy person, a faithful Christian, one who shares life in Christ."<sup>1</sup>

It's a very broad definition, isn't it? And, it's supposed to be

The most familiar saints are probably the ones like St. Bart for whom our church gets its name: individuals who lived such godly lives that after they died they went through a rigorous process called canonization to be deemed a Saint

And then these saints are venerated and prayed to

The idea being that since they lived such godly lives on earth, they must have a special place in heaven and closer access to God so praying to them gives us closer access – instead of six degrees of separation it's more like 3 if you pray to a saint

This is the Roman Catholic process that was our process as Protestants before the reformation – so we share many of these saints with the Roman Catholic Church

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/glossary/saint/>

Neither the Episcopalian/Anglican tradition nor my Lutheran tradition continues this process

One of the insights of the Reformation was that, yes, there are people who have lived wonderfully, god-filled lives including martyrs who have died for the faith and they should be remembered.

But, Paul in his letters speaks of saints as not only those who have lived extraordinary lives, but those of us who live ordinary lives, too – those who are baptized, those who live out a life of faith, those who gather in the name of Christ like we do today – look around, you are surrounded by saints!

The ordinary and the extraordinary

And, isn't this exactly what we see and hear in the gospel story today – “Blessed are you who are poor...Blessed are you who are hungry...Blessed are you who weep...Blessed are you when people hate you...for surely your reward is great in heaven”

Rev. Dr. David Lose, a pastor and former preaching professor, notes that “according to God, to recognize your vulnerability is what it means to be a saint. Not to be perfect, or to be different, or to be particularly pious, or to be zealous, but to be vulnerable and out of that vulnerability to turn to God in need.”<sup>2</sup>

When I think of vulnerability, I think of being the middle point of that tug-of-war rope again – that tender middle location where on one side there's safety and security and on the other danger or grief

Vulnerability is that in between place where we recognize that we are human and that as humans our lives can go one way or the other – we are not invincible and we are not inconsolable

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.davidlose.net/2016/11/all-saints-c-saintly-vulnerability/>

Dr. Lose reminds us that “vulnerability is a nice sounding word that names a condition most of us would like to avoid. Vulnerability names the condition of need and dependence that is often not comfortable and that our culture regularly invites us to imagine that we can and should avoid”

We’re not supposed to reside in the middle of the tug-o-war rope, we’re supposed to reside totally in the happy, safe, secure, invincible side

We’re allowed to mourn our friends and family members who die, but only for a couple days – then we’re encouraged to get back on our feet, buck up, put on a good face and get back out there

We’re not supposed to be depressed, we’re not supposed to worry

“While vulnerability is uncomfortable,” Dr. Lose writes, “it is also what makes us human. As Brene Brown reminds us, when we try to numb those things that are uncomfortable or pose a risk – feelings of sadness, grief, and vulnerability – we also numb our capacity to feel joy, satisfaction, and happiness.”

It’s just the God’s honest truth, we don’t live solely on one side of the game, we live in the middle - constant pulling and pushing

And, thanks be to God, because popular theology – the ways that society tries to get us to think about God and faith – would say that God is also only on one side of that game: the game of happiness, security, safety, success, joy, etc. etc.

But my friends, listen to Jesus’ words yet again today: “Blessed are you who are poor...Blessed are you who are hungry...Blessed are you who weep...Blessed are you when people hate you...for surely your reward is great in heaven”

Our faith, the teachings of our church and our faithful fore-parents and grandparents, recognized a more complicated and complex truth which is, as Dr. Lose puts it, “that vulnerability is not something to shun or deny...God has promised to meet us precisely at our points of vulnerability, our points of need, and our points of brokenness.”

Exactly where we are – whether we’re in that middle place, vulnerable, and feeling the tenderness of life that can be pushed and pulled one way or the other, or if we’re teetering towards one of the ends – in a place of true joy and gratitude, or the other direction: experiencing grief and sadness – GOD IS PRESENT

You beautiful saints – you beautiful, complex saints – God is present to you right now! And, God loves you just where you are!

On this All Saints’ Day – the day when we remember all the saints, and particularly the saints in our community who have passed this year and the saints who have journeyed to that nearer presence of God in previous years – we are reminded of yet another push and pull: certainly the push and pull of joy and grief as we remember loved ones who have passed, but also the push and pull of life and death.

In our gospel reading today, Jesus names the polarities of life and recenters us on what is true beyond time and space: that we are loved and held in the arms of God now and through eternity

We gather today surrounded by saints – those living, and those who have died

And, we gather in the promise of the saints yet to be!

May the tenderness of this day be to you a blessing

And, may we go forth and be vulnerable, held in the hope and presence of a loving God. Amen.