

All Saints Sermon
The Rev. Lisa Graves
All rights reserved.

Luke's sermon on the plain
sounds a lot like the sermon
on the mount found in Matthew.

Both start with a series
of proclamations called beatitudes,
and both drop bombshells
on the status quo.

We may not think about
how radical these beatitudes are –
they are familiar to us.
Blessed are the poor,
blessed are the hungry,
blessed are those who weep.
Every line of this gospel
is a challenge.

It's true.
Sometimes when we hear
these words that the hungry,
the poor, the persecuted
are blessed, we want
to groan to the Lord,
Lord you have blessed us enough.

It's hard to hear these words,
when news channels spew
a constant stream
of examples of those
who are suffering,
those who are hungry,
those who are sick and dying,
falsely persecuted,
facing poverty,
death and destruction.
It is hard to face these
margins and declare
God's blessing
upon them.

It was just as hard
to hear two thousand years ago.
Adolf Deissman says that
Jesus takes the culture's standards
and turns them upside down.
"Those we would call wretched

Jesus says are blessed and happy.
Those we say are happy and successful
Jesus calls out as wretched.

William Barclay tells us that
“What Jesus is saying is this,
“If you set your heart and bend
your whole energies
to obtain the things
which the world values,
you will get them –
but that is all you will ever get.

If on the other hand
you set your heart
and bend all your energies
to be utterly loyal to God
and true to Christ,
you will run into all kinds of trouble;
you may by the world’s standards
look unhappy, but much
of your payment is still to come;
and it will be joy eternal.”

This gospel was assigned
today because today
is a major feast day
in the life of the Christian church.

Today we celebrate All Saints,
the day set aside
to commemorate the saints
who have lived in faith before us.
Now, when we think of saints,
we think of halos and holy people.
I picture Mother Theresa
or Saint Mary with peaceful smiles
and hearts full of love.

But sainthood can also
be violent and messy.
Many of the Christian saints
were early Christians martyrs
who lived in a time
when Jesus words about
being reviled and separated
and persecuted would have
described their very circumstances.

These martyrs were killed
in violent and horrific ways

because they would not
recant their faith,
they walked into Roman Arenas,
facing death by fire or beast
or crucifixion
and amazingly they walked in,
peacefully, joyfully, certain
that their reunion with Christ
was moments away.

Certain that their faith
was more important
than any reprieve
the world might have to offer.

Early in the seventh century,
the Pantheon,
an immense round temple
dedicated to all of the
pagan gods of Rome,
was rededicated by Pope Boniface IV
in honor of St. Mary and All Martyrs.

The anniversary of the rededication
of that church was observed annually
in Rome as a feast
of all of the saints,
known and unknown,
who had no feast day of their own.

A century later,
the date of the feast
was moved to November 1st
and, finally, in the ninth century,
the observance was extended
to the whole Church.

Which is why on this day
we not only remember
the great saints known to
all the church,
but we commemorate also
those saints known only to us,
those souls that we
have loved in this life
who are now a part
of the great cloud of witnesses,
the communion of all
faithful people who have
gone before us.

There is a familiar hymn
that sings of the saints of god,
ending each line with
“And I want to be one too!”

We do want to be saints.
We want the strength
and courage to choose
God’s way over the world;
as described in our gospel
we want the fortitude
to stay true
to the commandments
and the path laid out for us by Christ
to serve the less fortunate
ignoring the lures of wealth
and power and prestige.

You see, it really does
boil down to choice.
We have choices
to make every day
and each one can take us
closer to the World’s vision
of greatness or the vision
provided for us in Christ.
Many have tried to cheat the process.

There is the story of two brothers
who lived a life of crime.
They were the most sordid
sort of mobster,
selling death and destruction
to innocents,
robbing the vulnerable
of their dignity,
their hopes
and their lives.

Drugs, prostitution, slavery,
murder, torture were all
part of their daily routine
and they were notorious
in their activities and exploits.

This continued until one day,
the oldest brother died.
The younger brother
was devastated but determined
to give his brother the grandest
funeral to be had.

The problem was the church.
Neither brother attended church a
and not many churches
would welcome
the criminals into their midst,
since their reputations
were well-earned and well-known.

Finally, the younger brother
found a church that was
undergoing a capitol campaign.

Figuring his money would buy
his brother a place in the kingdom,
the younger went to the pastor.
“Look, pastor, “ he said
“I know you need money
to fix up this church,
and I figure my
million dollar donation
will plug a lot of leaks
in your roof.

The only catch is you gotta
bury my brother
and in his eulogy
you’ve got to say
he was a saint.”

The pastor, who had seen
a lot of things in his day,
thought for a minute
and finally agreed
on one conditions.
He had to have the money
in advance and all he had
to do was say
that the man had been a saint.

The day of the funeral arrived.
As the curious and the corrupt
filled the pews
the pastor began his sermon.

He talked about
all the awful things
the man had done.
He listed every sin,
told about every lie,
every murder,

every innocent life destroyed.

The living brother fumed
As the Pastor went on and on,
filling up more than 30 minutes
with his laundry list
of the evils and sins
of the man laid out before them.

Finally, eyes glowing
the pastor shouted,
"This man was
an abomination to society,
an evil presence among us,
the worst kind of sinner
But
Compared to his brother here,
he was a saint!"

We needn't despair
because sainthood
is difficult but not impossible.

Mary Reed Newland, tells us
that "The feast of All Saints
is one of the greatest
of all the feasts because
it celebrates what
could have been
impossible.

The cross is a tree that bears fruit.
This is the feast of its harvest.
The celebrations
of the mysteries in the life
of Our Lord are glorious
and there is no
detracting from them.
But He was God.

This day we celebrate
the perfecting of human nature,
by grace pouring
from the side of Christ
on the cross,
through His Church
and His sacraments,
remaking men after
their despoiling in the Garden."

Today we also consecrate
your joyful offerings
to St. Philip's.

These slips of paper and envelopes
represent your commitment
and loyalty, your love
and friendship,
your joy and thanksgiving
and the certainty
that you share with this church family,
that what we do here
is important and must
continue for this day
and tomorrow.

And that is not only
a humbling thing
to witness as your rector,
it is a humbling
and gratifying thing
to do on this day,
the day we celebrate
the saints who have prayed
and worshiped
in this space before us.
It is also as a pledge
to continue our work
on behalf of those
who will pray and worship
in this place when we are gone.

I invite you now
to close your eyes
and picture those saints

who you have known.
Those who were especially faithful,
those who were holy
in your life and those
who were imperfect,
those you love and long to see.

Open your heart
and let the memory
of these departed
loved ones fill you
to the brim with the hope
of reunion and the promise
of communion.

Let their memories
be your offering
and thanksgiving as we pray...

Holy and Loving God,
as the angels and all the saints
gather before your throne
and proclaim your everlasting
praise and glory,
so we gather here today
in your holy sanctuary
to worship and adore you.

Stir up, O Lord, your faithful ones
to seek more eagerly
your living presence and attend
us in this time we have set aside
o that we may more worthily magnify
your most holy name.
Grant us grace to follow those
who have gone before us in lives
of faith and commitment,
that we, with them, may know
the inexpressible joys you have
prepared for those who love you –
we ask it through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. AMEN.