

“Being a blessing”

1. On this day when we remember the Saints of the church, we think about blessings
 - a. We consider what a blessing these people we remember are and have been to us.
 - b. But today’s passage offers us a challenge
 - i. Because it’s well known, our eyes may glaze over, and our ears may get distracted
 - ii. We may think we know what the meaning of the passage is and can picture how the sermon will turn out.
 - iii. We think we know and just then we realize we might actually not really know.
 - iv. These blessings refer to people who are hungry, who are poor, who are mourning, who are despised, AND yet Jesus calls them blessed
 - v. There is a significant tension in that
 - vi. Just consider how this week our newsfeed, and newspaper and TV news have been filled with stories of people who are going to go hungry because the federal SNAP food benefits (what used to be called food stamps) are being stopped because of politics.
 1. While the powerful jockey for power, the people in need get trampled.
 2. And Jesus calls them blessed
 - vii. So here we are, you and I, reading a story where Jesus said people are blessed who are hungry now.
 - viii. Jesus likewise says those who are poor are blessed. And so we wrestle with what that means
2. Jesus knew his audience and spoke right to them – with blessings and with warnings
 - a. It’s important to consider that the people Jesus was speaking to were those he was listing
 - i. Among those who followed him and who were there listening were people who were both poor and rich, hungry and satisfied, grieving and rejoicing...
 - b. And as far as I can tell, nowhere else in the scriptures is there a blessing pronounced for the poor and hungry.
 - i. What we see several times are passages where God blesses those who take care of the poor and hungry
 - ii. God blesses their generosity. And it is clear that the poor and the hungry are God’s priority to care for, thus should be our priority as well.
 - c. So, as Jesus does in many ways elsewhere, there is an act of upending the usual script here:
 - i. Blessed are you who are poor today. Blessed are you because God has not forgotten you today. And because tomorrow the Realm of God will be yours.
 - ii. Already that’s revolutionary
 - iii. And please know that the expectation of caring for those in need remained. So in pointing out the poor among them, Jesus is still drawing our attention to our duty to care for the vulnerable.

- iv. So I will go out on a limb here and say that Jesus is meaning yet another thing: We as a community are blessed because of you, you who are poor and hungry and grieving.
 - v. We are blessed because of your resilience, your faith, and because we have the privilege (the duty) to come alongside you in support.
 - d. And then come the warnings
 - i. You're heading for trouble, you who are rich, you who have a full tummy, you would think life is just a bowl of cherries.
 - ii. You're heading for trouble not for what you have, but for the assumption that all is right with the world if all is right with you.
 - iii. That is: if your bank balance or full pantry prevents you from seeing those in need, you have lost perspective. And what's more, you could be in for being in need yourself.
 - e. So, you may say: the lesson is simply that as long as we give some money to the poor and some food to the hungry we've covered our bases.
 - f. Well, I don't know how to break it to you: that was Jesus just getting started.
 - g. Yes, be a blessing by making sure all in the community are supported and they don't fall through the safety net.
 - h. But community in the realm of God is more than that
 - i. Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you, curse you, mistreat you, cheat you, manipulate you.
 - ii. Do to others as you would have them do to you.
 - i. That lands differently.
 - j. It is also not something said before Jesus said it (and not repeated much afterwards)
 - k. The value of community is mutual care.
 - l. The cost of community is mutual care.
- 3. I don't want to romanticize the lives of those whom we have lost this past year, but I want to honestly remember that they helped us consider the value and the cost of mutual care
 - a. Cal and Edith visited people in the hospital
 - b. Ben and Bob quietly and generously supported those in need
 - c. Margy and Donna prayed and acted with courage
 - d. Jim and John built community wherever they went
 - e. Pauline and Katie shared hospitality and love so freely
 - f. Laurence and Cliff cared for their families
 - g. Paul, Thelma and Tom graciously shared their unique gifts to bless all around them
- 4. The value of community is the kind of mutual care where people give of themselves graciously, and allow themselves to receive that same care with humility.
 - a. The cost of community is the mutual care where people learn to bury old grievances, patch up broken relationships, and allow forgiveness to change them to their core.
- 5. Blessed are each of us. We are a blessing to one another, in particular when we courageously erase whatever creates enemies, and when all learn to live treating others as anyone else would like to be treated.