All Saints Sunday - November 1, 2026

Revelation 7:9-17 1 John 3:1-3 Matthew 5:1-12

"Blessed"

1. It's a common enough question which maybe we answer too simply. Someone asks: "How are you?" and our reflex answer is probably "fine" or "all right"
    a. I have heard some African American Christian colleagues answer that question in a way that has made me stop and consider it.
    b. "How are you?" They reply: "Blest" or even "Blest to be a blessing"
    c. I think one of your former pastors, Rob Craig, would answer that same question with "I'm grateful"
    d. There is something to their effort to answer that common question in an uncommon way
    e. They are affirming that there is a consistent underlying quality, no matter how they may feel or how they may be doing in that snapshot in time
    f. For them it becomes grounding to say "I am blest" or "I am grateful" no matter what else may be happening around them or to them.
2. Our gospel passage uses that word "blessed" as Jesus is preaching what we call the Sermon on the Mount
    a. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the pure in heart, the peacemakers
    b. The word translated "blessed" means fortunate, well off, happy.
    c. As is the case in so many of the teachings of Jesus, he turns things upside down to let us know that the way God's reign works is not the way we humans would run things if we were in charge (or as we attempt to run things currently)
    d. Jesus was surrounded on the hillside that day by the kind of people who followed him throughout his ministry, people who were looking for comfort, for healing, for direction
    e. As Jesus spoke, they felt seen when he referred those who were meek, who fought for justice, mercy and peace. That was them.
    f. Jesus saw and affirmed the crowd with people who were grieving, reviled and persecuted. That was them.
    g. Every day Jesus was with these, his people, who were shoved to the edges of community by the power-hungry, the arrogant, the willfully cruel.
    h. But why refer to them as blessed or happy?
    i. With love and compassion, and in his characteristically revolutionary way which we should not try to tame, Jesus says:

i. Those among you going through these difficult and cruel circumstances are on the right track in the realm of God,
ii. You are on God's side in your efforts to seek justice for all, in spite of the high cost the fight come with
iii. and so you are fortunate, you are blessed, and God is therefore on your side,
iv. God sees you, loves you, blesses you, and your faithful witness helps usher in the justice of God's reign

3. Today, on All Saints Sunday, we love and bless those children of God who have gone before us who showed in their faithful life a courageous willingness to follow the example of Jesus, sometimes at a cost to them.
    a. We give God thanks for them, knowing that no matter what life threw their way, they stood grounded in that blessing from God
    b. I think about Madonna
        i. Serving around the world sharing the love of God, traveling with her husband to help bring sight to people living in poverty in remote areas, and to advocate for them so they could be seen by the governments who overlooked them
    c. I think about Erin
        i. Embracing her role in the family caregiving of her mom Katie in her decline, but then herself facing, with even rebellious energy, her own journey with cancer. Erin consistently displayed her courageous and independent spirit advocating for our LGBTQ siblings.
    d. I think about Judy
        i. With wisdom, humor and fierce love she cared for her husband John after his stroke. She had that sparkle in her eye and a ready smile (and I sometimes got the ready frown!) in being uncompromisingly herself
    e. We each could think about other loved ones and their faith and resilience in the face of difficulty, and pain, and injustice, but also remember their big heart in the presence of joy, healing and justice.
    f. We thank God, as they did, not because of obstacles we face, but for the way God makes a way through them (as Dr. Yancy preached last week)
    g. We thank God, as they did, not because of the cruelty we encounter, but because of the stamina God gives us to counter it with compassion
    h. Blessed are those who face the terrible circumstances which Jesus lists, and blessed are we when we are shoulder to shoulder with them
    i. Blessed are they and blessed are we when we stand firm in the swirling of the human greed and idolatry which pushes people to the margins

j. Blessed are they and blessed are we as God shows us the way to stay on the side of the realm of God, even when signs of God's realm feel like they're few and far between
k. Blessed are they,
    i. for they will be comforted.
    ii. for they will inherit the earth.
    iii. for they will be filled with righteousness.
    iv. for they will receive mercy.
    v. for they will see God.
    vi. for they will be called children of God.
    vii. for theirs is the realm of heaven.

Reflection questions:

1. Remember a loved one who has passed away who taught you something about being a courageous follower of Jesus.
2. Read Matthew 5:1-12 (the Beatitudes) and consider people you've known who have lived by these priorities of the Realm of God. Would they have consider themselves "blessed" in the midst of difficulty?
3. How do you want people to remember you, and how do the priorities in the Beatitudes figure in that list?