

## Radiant Saints

### *Matthew 5: 1-12*

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Go through the list of names mentioned this morning. Our saints. Beloved ones who have left their impact on our lives. They filled our hearts with fond memories that might choke us up. We miss their mannerisms and quirks and “their way” that made them who they are. We remember the busy bees like Bea Stuber and the pillar saints like Bob Pursley. We remember the Pattersons who sat on the one side, and Bert and Carol who sat on the other. They are the names on our list of wonderful people we miss having around. So today we remember them and retell the stories with joy.

But the other truth is saints aren't only the dead—they are the living as well. If we think about it, the Holy Spirit is for the living and the gift of who we are is impactful as well. The issue is, of course, when we look in the mirror, we probably don't say to ourselves, “Now there is a saint!” Of course not! We probably say, “Nah, not that one.” After all, we know ourselves. We know we have so not-so-holy moments. We know we can be judgmental, or cranky, or have struggles we are ashamed of. We can all name reasons why our application for sainthood can be denied. I even once heard someone once say, “I'll wait until I'm dead to be called a saint!” We are all probably fine with someone calling us a saint after we're gone, but while we are still here, nah!

So perhaps we need to reframe the definition. You see, Jesus climbs the mountain like Moses did to receive the commandments. Except, Jesus climbs to teach. He opens his mouth and the first thing he does is pour out blessings like God does in the beginning. “Blessed are the poor. The meek. The mourning. The merciful. Those who hunger for justice.” But these are characteristics we would not normally place in the blessed category. If we understand the Greek we could say the word isn't really blessed it is “happy.” Happy are the poor? The meek? The mourning? Also, not a category we'd place them in. So perhaps the more appropriate word that encapsulates what Jesus is saying is more like “radiant.” Radiant are those... which might also ring false. AND for those of us who have spend time with the poor, meek, mourning, merciful, that might be exactly the word we could use. They may not radiate confidence, or power, or even happiness, but they

do radiate truth or courage, or most importantly: our humanity. Which we all know isn't perfect, but it is holy.

This year on All Saints Day I was scrolling through Facebook when I saw an update from an acquaintance from seminary. I learned she had recently lost a child from a genetic degenerative disease. She wrote, "Words cannot explain what it is like to have three grieving people in the same house." And then she wrote, "Words cannot also explain what it is like to have a community of love surrounding us." Now I do not want to sound trite, but while it clearly does not radiate joy; it radiates the humanity, the love, the truth, and it leaves an impact. Radiant are the mourning for they shall be comforted.

Before Covid we hosted a trans support group. It was for both trans folx and parents of trans children. In the group was a nine-year-old trans boy. I would watch him do flying ninja kicks in the Fellowship Hall. He beamed, but his parents had to transfer him to several different schools to protect him from bullying. When it was time for the meeting, he opted to hang out with me in the office. So I put on Netflix and then he saw the "I Choose Love" bracelets so he picked out a blue one for himself. And as he spun around in my chair he stopped, looked up at me and simply said, "You're nice." He was truly someone who was pure of heart and even though he had to switch schools several times, who he was radiated! And I knew that by being around him I was in the proximity of the radiance of God's kingdom.

There is something about being in the presence of those who stand neck deep in what is real about our humanity and tries to change what is dangerous about our world that truly radiates. And so if our antennas are up for what is holy around us, often it is with those in the most human of situations which makes our holiness detectors beep the loudest.

I spoke with Eliseo over text last week. He says to tell you "hola" and "el los extrana a todos" (he misses you all). They have found another church, but he says they do not feel cared for the way they felt cared for here. We centered those undocumented gentlemen for eight months. They stumbled into our little church and do you know what I saw? I saw this church radiating! And then we hosted a Transformation Gathering as a response to the bad bills being passed against trans folx. And do you know what I saw? I saw saints radiating! And it became clear that we are comfortable being surrounded by the poor, the meek, the mourning, the merciful, the justice-seekers. You all radiate whether you realize it or not! But I'm willing to bet you felt it too. And what was so fun about being a part of this was it just flowed out of us in an ordinary and everyday kind of way. It turns out being a saint, is just an ordinary person who blesses the fullness of our humanity and then blesses the world with the hope of making it radiate a bit more with peace and compassion, gentleness and justice.

I'm sure I'm not the only one with stories about someone who radiates. So turn to someone around you or pick a spot to have a brief conversation about someone you met or know who radiated. Could be someone living or dead, near or far. But tell your partner who they are and how they radiated. It's our humanity which makes us holy and our leaning into it which makes us radiate. So ordinary saints, take a moment and talk to your neighbor, and lean into what makes us holy: our being human together.