

All Saints Sunday
Church of the Holy Cross
November 2, 2014
The Rev. Elizabeth A.B. Tesi

Baptisms of Sadie Rose Blackford, Luke Hurley Herrmann, Ethan George Todd

Merry Christmas!

I know that Halloween was not even 48 hours ago. I know that we are celebrating All Saints' Day today, which is a major Feast in the church. But according to our culture, you and I have it all wrong. There are Christmas trees in the mall. What are you doing here? Get out there and buy stuff! If it is expensive, if it is on sale, if everyone else has one then your kid needs one too, if it is newer than the one you currently have, go out there and buy it. Buy more of it. Buy still more. As Shakespeare said, "There is money! Spend it! Spend it! Spend more!" The gospel of our culture commands you to buy. If you go down the street to the mall and buy IT right now, you will help defeat the terrorists, and usher in a golden age of democracy, capitalism, and trickle-down economics. In fact, if you go there now and buy IT, you will look thinner, smell nicer, and have less back pain thanks to the bean bag chair store. So you will be happier. And that is the purpose of our life, right? Buy our way to joy.

Now let me go out on a limb. Right now, you could be drinking your mimosas and ordering your bacon crispy and heading to the mall. But here you are, missing brunch! And so I suggest that you are here in this church today because there is something you seek that you cannot find in the sparkly Christmas trees, at the bottom of the Medium Brown Bag or in between the bun of Elevation Burger.

Today, you have come to sit at Jesus' feet as we hear part of the sermon on the mount. Some of you here today are part of our families celebrating a baptism. If you are going to attend one Episcopal service this year, this is an excellent choice. All Saints' is a major feast. The Sermon on the Mount has been long held to be one of Jesus' ultimate collections of sayings. In specific, Matthew (the gospel writer) seats Jesus on a high place, not merely speaking, but proclaiming to the court of disciples near him and the crowds that throng below, God's vision of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus clearly claims not just the role of teacher or prophet, but of King, Messiah, God incarnate. Today, Jesus proclaims to us a definitive interpretation of the Torah, and calls God's people to be bridge builders, people of Shalom, a blessed people reaching out in peace to all the world around them.

See what I mean about this being a great Sunday to be here?

I'm going to tell you a secret: the four gospels that we have in the Bible... they aren't by any means the only Gospels out there. These are the canonical gospels, declared authoritative somewhere around the 5th century by Pope Innocent I who was following the footsteps of Irenaeus. But there are other gospels which have been written. We just

don't call them canonical because of heresies. (See, I told you guys this was a great Sunday! Baptisms, saints, heresies...) The Gospel of Thomas was a bestseller a few years ago. Some believe that Mary Magdalene was the creative force behind the work known as the Gospel of Mary. And what we know as the Beatitudes, the collection of readings we heard read today, they weren't actually written by Matthew, or Mark, or Luke. They are a collection of many great sayings likely spoken by Jesus in many times and many places to many of God's beloved people, again, and again. Matthew compiled his story using the Q source, a gospel that was lost long ago, and that we know about only because we have circumstantial evidence that it existed because of common stories and phrases in the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This good news we tell you- that you are a blessed people called to mission- is a gospel older than the Bible itself.

Now on to the Beatitudes. The meaning for us pivots on how we understand the word we translate as Blessed. The word could also be translated as "happy" or "congratulations." Imagine that: Congratulations on being poor, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. It sounds as though these struggles are achievements. Congratulations, little ones, on your baptism. You have done nothing more than simply exist and be beloved, but congratulations on this great work in becoming formally named into God's family. This is essentially why so many translators continue to use the word "blessed". Happy or congratulations are also good choices and could be correct, but they carry all sorts of connotations with them that distract us from Jesus' purpose.

And Jesus' purpose is a very important one. Jesus calls us to be a blessed people on a mission to know that we are beloved and to share that love with the world. Today, we see the part where Matthew places Jesus in a high position, seated as if on a throne, speaking as if proclaiming to His people. Matthew wants us to walk away from this secure in our knowledge that Jesus is King above all Kings, Lord of Lords, the Messiah, the Omnipotent, the Reason for our Being.

And for that reason, celebrating baptisms today is so very proper and right in all ways. Blessed are you who are celebrating your baptisms- congratulations on this day! You are surrounded by families, wrapped in a cocoon of love. Although you will not remember what we do, your family and friends have gathered here so that you can be named as blessed and welcomed into this family as Christ's own forever. It is especially joyful on this day when God's people celebrate our Messiah, Jesus, as Lord of All, and celebrate the Kingdom Come on this major Feast day.

And for that reason, celebrating this great feast of All Saints' Day is so very proper and right. We name and honor those saints who went before and who we love and miss so dearly this year. And in our naming Jesus as Messiah and the King in whom we place our trust, we celebrate that our separation is not eternal. Our pain is not eternal. Death itself is not eternal. Our suffering, as real as it is here, as much as bereavement sucks, as much as grief is soul-sucking and life-draining, this is not the end. Our souls are securely in the hands of God- blessed are you, and blessed are the saints who have preceded us, who are in God's presence now. Blessed are you who mourn, for you will be comforted.

It's not just words. It's an actual promise from God that goes back to before even the church itself.

And indeed, blessed are you, people of God. Because you are here, today. Whatever else you do today, whether you are joyful or mournful, whether you celebrate or sorrow, right now you are present in God's house. You are part of God's people who are called to be bridge builders to the hurting, sorrowing world around us. We have starving people calling to us for food. We have poor people crying out for solace. We have rich people weeping for the emptiness in their souls. We have people who don't yet know God walking up to our door. We have people mourning the loved ones they have lost. And you are here this morning hearing these promises of the blessings of God's people. You are called to be the peacemakers, the bridge builders, the kingdom of God come into this world. And that is an amazing mission indeed.

So yes, blessed are you, you who mourn. For you will be comforted, and because those we have lost still live in the presence of God. Blessed are you who are poor in spirit for the kingdom of God is yours to gain. Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are you pure in heart, especially our babies today, for they see God clearly. And blessed are you peacemakers, bridge builders, way makers... for you open the paths to God for the many who sorrow and who seek to solace. Blessed are you, happy are you, here in God's house. Congratulations to God's people. And may blessings, ever more eternal blessings, blessings which are older than any church on this earth, rain down upon you. Especially on this great Feast day, the day of All Saints. Indeed, may we be granted grace to follow the good examples of those saints who came before us, so we may also know those great joys prepared for us since before time, of a great and lasting peace in Christ.