

Matthew 5:1–12  
All Saints' Day  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
November 1, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Yesterday, October 31st, was Reformation Day, also known as Halloween, that is, All Hallow's Eve—the evening before All Hallows' Day or All Saints' Day. Everytime you pray the Lord's Prayer, you ask that God's name would be “hallowed” or “made holy.” Hallowed equals holy. So today, All Hallows' Day, is about the hallowed ones, the holy ones, who in Latin are called the saints, from the Latin word “sanctus.” All Saints' Day is about all the saints, whether known or unknown.

From early in the church's history, the apostles, the martyrs, the confessors—all those who bore witness to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—were honored in the church, most often on the day they died, or put another way, on the day their eternal birth was sealed with their own blood. After a time, there simply became too many paragons of the faith to celebrate. There aren't enough days in the year to celebrate each individual who has gone before us in the faith! So by the 4th century, there were days set aside throughout Christendom to celebrate all the martyrs for the faith. It's like when we celebrate birthdays on the first Sunday of each month. There are too many in the congregation to celebrate each day properly, so we lump groups of birthdays together.

The festival of All Saints as we know it on November 1st dates back to the 9th century in the British Isles and to the 10th century in the rest of Europe. Historically, All Saints' Day commemorates those who have been officially canonized, or declared to be saints, in the catholic

church, followed by All Souls' Day on November 2, which commemorates all the faithful departed. In the Lutheran Church, we often conflate the two festivals into All Saints' Day because the Apostle Paul addresses all believers as "saints," as holy ones in Christ Jesus: "To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints," "To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints," "with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaiah," "to the saints who are in Ephesus," "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi," "Greet every saint in Christ Jesus . . . all the saints greet you," "to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae." The Apostle Paul constantly refers to all believers as saints, as holy ones in Jesus Christ.

The Gospel text appointed for All Saints' Day comes from Matthew 5, the opening of Jesus's "sermon on the mount." The statements Jesus makes here are among His most well-known sayings, the Beatitudes. That word "beatitude" comes from the Latin "beatus," meaning "blessed." Nine times here Jesus calls people "blessed." At first, many take the Beatitudes as an admonition to a life of humility. They take the Beatitudes as prescriptive for the Christian life. This view cannot be denied. When Jesus teaches us that those who are blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the peacemakers, and the persecuted, He's also calling all those who hear to that same life of humility. And elsewhere in Scripture we are told that those who humble themselves under God's mighty hand will be exalted at the proper time (1 Pet 5:6).

Although the Beatitudes are *prescriptive*, telling us how to live the blessed life, they are more so descriptive of the life of the saints, the holy ones in Christ Jesus. Notice how the first four beatitudes describe people in terms of what they do not have. The poor in spirit are those who are spiritually impoverished, the crushed in spirit (Ps 34:18), crushed because of sin. The

saints recognize this condition they are in, yet they are blessed because God gives them the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who mourn have lost something or someone. They are sorrowful for what they no longer have, yet are blessed now because they *shall* be comforted at the Resurrection. Blessed are the meek. The word “meek” means “lowly” or “gentle.” The meek are seen as weak by the world. They are shoved aside so the strong can take what they want. And yet Jesus says it is the meek who shall inherit the earth, not the powerful and mighty. True power and might comes in meekness that recognizes its weakness and limits and submits to God and His Word. The meek in humility count others better than themselves. The meek shall inherit the earth. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness long for what they do not have, namely, righteousness. Yet these will be satisfied. Those who yearn for the righteousness of Christ receive the righteousness of Christ. The first four beatitudes describe the saints in terms of what they do not have now, but in terms of what God gives them or will give them in the future.

The next three beatitudes describe the saints in terms in what they have received, which effects how they now live. Blessed are the merciful. Those who have received mercy in the death of Jesus Christ are merciful to those around them, and in eternity they will receive mercy for all the mistakes they’ve made. We love because God first loved us. We forgive those who sin against us because God forgives us when we sin against Him. We are merciful to others because God has been merciful to us. Mercy triumphs over judgment (James 2:13). The pure in heart have been purified in the waters of Baptism. You’ve been given a clean conscience before God, purified of your sins in His sight. As the Epistle for today from 1 John 3 puts it: “we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies Himself as He is pure.” The peacemakers are able to make peace because they already

have peace with God in the blood of Jesus Christ. And those who have peace with God in the forgiveness of sins are then able to begin living at peace with those around them.

In the last section of the Beatitudes, Jesus then calls the saints blessed when they are persecuted for righteousness' sake, when they are reviled and persecuted, and spoken against by the children of this world. That's how the offspring of the serpent have always treated the prophets of God, and that's how the prophets of God will continue to be treated until the end. But blessed are you when others persecute you for the sake of Jesus. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in Heaven, as is the reward of all the saints who have gone before you.

So the Beatitudes are prescriptive, they instruct the saints what to do. The Beatitudes are also descriptive of who the saints are and what the saints will experience in this age and in the age to come. But the Beatitudes are primarily a description of Jesus Christ. Jesus was poor in spirit. He was often troubled in body and soul, but His is the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus mourned over friends and over His people according to the flesh, but took comfort in the promises of God. Jesus was meek, He came in gentleness and humility, and yet all rulers and creation itself are subject to Him. Jesus hungered and thirsted for that which is righteous and obtained that righteousness for all mankind. He is mercy itself. He is pure in heart, the one who beholds God face to face. Jesus is the Prince of Peace who brings peace to earth. And Jesus was persecuted for righteousness' sake, persecuted even unto death, that the Kingdom of Heaven might come to you in His resurrection. Blessed be our Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfills the Beatitudes. Blessed are you, baptized into Jesus Christ, for you are the blessed ones of the Lord, joined in the Body of Christ with all the saints who have gone before and all the saints who will come after.

As Lutherans, we understand that all Christians—all who believe and are baptized—are saints, declared holy and righteous on account of Jesus Christ. We look to those who have gone

before us in the faith that we might follow the example of their faith and good works. We truly honor the saints on this day, then, by thanking God for what He has worked through the saints, by letting the example of the saints' faith strengthen our faith, and by imitating their faith and virtues until we join them in glory.

We also remember today that in the Lord's Supper, heaven and earth are united when our Lord comes to us with His very Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins. In the Lord's Supper, we come together with that great multitude from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Here we are reminded that we shall hunger and thirst no more. The Lamb in the midst of the throne will guide us to springs of living water and wipe away every tear from our eyes. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of Heaven, with all those who have departed this life in faith, we laud and magnify God's glorious name, evermore praising Him here in time with the saints around us, and there in eternity with all the saints, saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen."

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.