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All Saints' Sunday: Matthew 5:1-12
1 November 2026

I love All Saints.
I love the music– I love the range of sacred music we have today.
I appreciate the built in chance to pause and think
about our loved ones who have already started
the heavenly chapter of their lives.

I also love thinking about The Saints, capital T, capital S
I've said this before and I'll say it again many times before all is said and done
I really do draw a lot of strength from our ancestors in the faith,
most of whom lived through incredibly difficult circumstances,
Both personally and politically,
and yet still managed to find hope & promise and joy
Through their faith in Jesus.

Given the lives of many saints, it makes a lot of sense that the appointed Gospel
for All Saints is often the Beatitudes, beatitude being the Latin word for "blessing."
These famous teachings happen at the very beginning
of Jesus' earthly ministry towards the beginning of the Gospel itself.

For his first teaching, Jesus takes all these incredibly difficult situations and tells people
That God is very much w/ them, or will be with them,
in incredibly difficult circumstances, either personally or politically.
The Beatitudes say, **there is nowhere God is not** (x2)

And you know, in the last several Sundays,
as we've been journeying through Jesus' last week from Matthew's point of view,
We see these Beatitudes become more than words for Jesus, too.
These supposed blessings are something God experiences as
The fully human Jesus.

Here, Jesus says, blessed are the merciful.
And yet, **Jesus**' own acts of mercy do not protect him
from the earthly powers-that-be in his own life.

Here, Jesus says, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.
And well, if that doesn't describe what happens in Jesus' last week,
I'm not sure what does.

The last part of the Beatitudes foreshadows, validates the disciples years later
being reviled, being persecuted, being falsely accused (5:11–12).

And these alleged blessings are not just for Jesus' first followers.
Long before he bcme a saint whose name we all know,
particularly here in Boston area
whose memory has managed to cross over into the more secular world,
way before he was associated with cute little shamrocks
and ridding islands of snakes,
Saint Patrick did not have an easy go of it.
He was a victim of human trafficking as a teenager.
Irish pirates captured him from his home
in Britain.

Patrick spent six grueling years as an unpaid shepherd, aka as a slave,
battling hunger, exposure, and isolation.
He escaped and then he later voluntarily returned to the land of his captors.
Patrick preached a very different way of life for particularly women,
Who made up a significant portion of his followers.
This new social order often upset elites
who benefited from the old order.

Speaking against and experiencing personal and political hardship
is practically a hallmark of many saints' lives, including more contemporary folks.
An Episcopal seminarian, who, before Somewhat reluctantly
accepting his call to ordination– he had doubts and he also needed
to help support his mom and sister after his dad's early death,
Jonathan Myrick Daniels joined the civil rights movement.
Originally planning to in Alabama briefly,
Jonathan ended up staying for months,
Doing the slow and critical work of
developing relationships.

When an armed volunteer deputy named Tom Coleman,
confronted a group of civil rights workers one day in 1965,
Jonathan instinctively stepped in front of a young Black teenager, Ruby Sales,
and Jonathan took a fatal gunshot wound to the chest.
Ruby testified against this man, Tom Coleman, in court.
A jury of 12 white men acquitted him in < 2 hours.
The juxtaposition was just too much for some
And it eventually led to important changes
In the jury selection process across
the United States,
particularly but not only
in the South.

I sometimes laugh and shake my head when in the hymn we just sang
"and one was slain by a fierce wild best"
is followed immediately in the very next line with
"And there's not any reason no not the least
that I shouldn't be one too." I mean, what?

Here is why the saints are so important. The saints show us that they understand,
they were somehow able to get that in Jesus' death, Jesus enters that distance,
that distance what we all see and experience and question–
The distance between God's promise & our own lived experience,
Because ya'll that distance between God's promises
and the human experience, personally & politically
can feel and be ridiculously far apart
At times.

Jesus does not just point out that gap, Jesus does not only talk about
the gap between what God assures and what it actually is.
During the crucifixion, Jesus actually enters into that gap,
Goes into distance between God's promises
and what actually is
with his own body, with his own soul.
Gospels often comment on this,
Having a bystander say,
"He trusts in God.
Let God deliver him" (27:43)

It's easier to believe in God when things we can actually recognize as blessings
Are happening either in our own lives or in the world.
And, by choosing to die on the cross Jesus says,
So too in the worst moments imaginable,
even those moments you can't imagine
b/c they are just too awful,
when it's all falling apart,
I, Jesus, am there.
I am with you b/c
there is nowhere God
cannot be.

The crucified Christ centers God exactly where folks most want to say God is absent.
If we are willing to not skip to the empty tomb, to Easter, to the resurrection
we can see that Scripture wants us to grapple with
Jesus' needless, excruciating, lonely, unjust death.
Not to torture us, not to make us feel bad,
but to demonstrate **there is nowhere God cannot be.**

This also means that those who mourn
do not have to overcome their grief before God draws near.
The poor in spirit do not have to dig up some hidden reserve of strength
When the world has already depleted and exhausted them– or us.
The meek do not have to somehow get the energy
and the influence to fight for their own place here,
A place that has often been denied to them.

The lives of the saints illustrate the ways our ancestors in the faith
have been able to find hope and trust in Jesus.
The saints inwardly digested that Jesus' crucifixion,
A moment full of fear, and violence, and cruelty,
A moment that could be used to demonstrate
that the reality of that incredible distance between
what God promises and the human experience
The saints inwardly digested that Jesus'
Crucifixion nullifies the distance's
Power, ultimately.

Blessed are the saints who demonstrate with their very lives
That **there is nowhere God cannot be**. Amen.