

Weekend of Sunday, November 3, 2019
All Saints Sunday/Lectionary X/Proper X/Year C
Primary Text: Luke 6:20-31
Sermon Title: “Making Saints out of Sinners”

Theme

In echoes of the prophet Isaiah and Mary’s song of praise, Jesus reveals surprising things about who enjoys blessing and who endures woe. He invites his disciples to shower radical love, blessing, forgiveness, generosity, and trust, even to enemies and outsiders.

Text

²⁰Then [Jesus] looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹“Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²²“Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

²⁴“But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

²⁵“Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

²⁷“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. ³¹Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Sermon

Today is an important festival day on the calendar of the church. It's All Saints Sunday, a day upon which we take time to remember those saints we have lost in the last year and to give thanks to God for having had them in our lives.

At first glance, we might wonder why the lectionary editors thought this particular set of readings is appropriate for this day. Lets take a look and see.

The First Reading from Daniel, like most of Daniel is like a bad acid trip – that, for me is an expression. I've never tried it.

Even stranger than the reading itself is the way it is pieced out. As you can see, verses 4-14 are missing. The lectionary editors do that from time to time when the excluded verses do nothing to illuminate the text. However in this case, verses 13-14 are critical to our understanding of the passage and so here it is:

¹³As I watched in the night visions,
I saw one like a human being
coming with the clouds of heaven.
And he came to the Ancient One
and was presented before him.
¹⁴To him was given dominion
and glory and kingship,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not pass away,
and his kingship is one
that shall never be destroyed.

Now this passage may sound familiar to you, because it is a passage that is often used to illustrate and foreshadow the Trinity and Jesus Christ way back in the ancient of days.

The Ancient One is God the Father.

The “one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven” is God’s Messiah, Jesus Christ. In this passage, God the Father, gives his Son, Jesus Christ, our savior all that that is listed here. Though not the one we sing this Sunday, some versions of the Canticum of Praise, are based on this passage. And other hymns, like “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise,” and “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus,” and “O Worship the King” are also based on that passage.

And why is it put to music so often, you ask? Because it was a powerful foreshadowing of redemption of God’s people more than 500 years before God’s Messiah actually came, in a time when Daniel’s people, the Israelites were suffering through the Babylonian captivity.

So you see, it would have been a great comfort to the ancient Israelites to know that their suffering was noticed by God and that they will be redeemed at some point. And it should come as a great comfort to us too, especially to those among us who are still mourning the loss of a loved one.

In the Second Reading, we hear the Apostle Paul affirm Daniel when he wrote,

²⁰God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. ²²And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

All of us should take comfort in these words as well, because, when we lose a loved one, whether we expect it due to a long illness or because of advanced age, or when it surprises us like death by auto accident or drug overdose or any other untimely death, though we might still be devastated, the mature in faith will turn their consternation and grief over to God revealed in Jesus Christ, who we know in faith and trust is always on duty and in control – though it may not appear so to us.

Jesus Christ IS the gospel of our salvation, as Paul wrote, and it is through him that all our hope is found, both for our deceased loved ones, and for ourselves.

And the opposite is perilously true too. Without Jesus there is no hope.

And then in the Gospel Reading we have the Beatitudes of Jesus. What do they have to do with the other two readings and All Saints Sunday? I am so glad you asked.

This passage comes from Chapter 6, so fairly early in Jesus public ministry, in fact, it was just in verses 13-16 that Luke listed the newly called disciples. Again, going back a couple of verses will illuminate the context that elicited this Sermon on the Plain which contained the Beatitudes among other teachings.

¹⁷He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

So Jesus' reputation has already spread throughout the countryside and needy people, both spiritually and physically needy people, turned out to see him, hear him preach and teach, and be healed by him.

It was within this context, his newly called disciples, who surely had no idea what discipleship in him meant, and this large crowd of others, needy people for whom Judaism had been a disappointment and only seemed to exclude them, that Jesus spoke what many then and many still today might call platitudes.

I can just hear them saying, "Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the weak, the weeping, the hated. Yea, right Jesus, ours is the kingdom of God. We're living like kings out here!"

To this I have two All Saint's Day responses.

1) Jesus spoke in the present tense, so therefore this is not something they have to wait for, although it is something they have to work for. They, we, should bring about the Kingdom of God wherever we are. We should be about Kingdom business now. We should be good stewards and share our resources and enter into the suffering of others so that we can help them through it. Jesus listed

several practical applications in verses 27-31. And when we do those we get over our self-centeredness and our misery is relieved.

But wait, there's more.

2) Jesus also spoke in the future tense so that all that he said will come to pass will be awarded to those who lived faithful lives. So for all of you who are grieving the loss of a loved one, in faith we believe that the promises of God revealed in Jesus Christ have come true for your loved ones.

So today, though it might look like the lectionary editors have handed us a mess of readings to deal with, I think the opposite is true.

In the First Reading from Daniel, the prophet saw a vision of one coming who would have all power and dominion over all the earth. Through him, the promise is that his "holy ones" will possess the Kingdom of God forever and ever. We, the faithful ones, passed and present, are the ones who will possess the Kingdom of God.

In the Gospel Reading, Jesus Christ himself, the one about whom Daniel foretold, affirms that he is the one by telling his disciples of every place and every time that the Kingdom is ours, and we get to participate in making it happen by living godly lives and living generously now.

And in the Second Reading, Paul reminds us that that inheritance is ours already, and so we should live lives of praise of God now for all his benefits.

How is this possible, you ask. Because God revealed in Jesus Christ can make saints out of sinners. And aren't we glad he can!

And since this is All Saint's Sunday, all of us, but especially those who are grieving the loss of a loved one, ought to just cuddle up to God revealed in Jesus Christ through our spiritual worship and wallow in his love, and goodness, and blessing. For your loved ones who have passed on are not simply dead and gone, but have gone on to that which was planned for all people of faith since the beginning.

How wonderful is that!

How wonderful is our God!

And how wonderful is his Messiah and our Savior Jesus Christ!

Prayer

Almighty God, you have knit your people together in one communion in the mystical body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Grant us grace to follow your blessed saints in lives of faith and commitment, and to know the inexpressible joys you have prepared for those who love you, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen