

**All Saints Sunday + November 5, 2017**

**Matthew 5:1-12**

Atonement Lutheran Church, Beloit, WI

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Today we honor All Saints Day. It is 9:25 a.m. Central Standard Time on November 5, 2017. But All Saints reaches beyond time in joining together past, present and future. The past, in the covenant that God made long ago—"I will be their God, and they shall be my people." The present, in that we are experiencing God's gift of Jesus Christ for us and the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. And the future, in that we look to the consummation of all things in God's love at the end of time, when we and all creatures will join all the saints from all the ages in God's glory forever.

Our Gospel reading for today, known as the Beatitudes, also bring together past, present and future. Because of what has come before, these verses tell us where we are in Jesus Christ at the present moment, and they point us to what lies ahead.

At this point in Matthew's Gospel, early in Jesus' ministry, Jesus has gone up the mountain with his disciples to get away from the crowds of people who have been following him. He leaves the masses below and sits down in a quiet place for an intimate talk with the disciples he's just called. It's his first real teaching moment. His purpose is to tell them about the tension between the "already" and the "not yet" in which they are living, and in which we, as God's disciples of the present time, still live today.

The context is this: God has already broken into world history with the gift of his Son. This gift itself is an expression of God's grace—that God does not hold our sin against

us, but loves us so much that he gave his only Son, that we may know forgiveness from sin and eternal life. Knowing that we are loved and forgiven, we continue to experience this abundant grace, which comes to us through faith. Nothing can change the magnitude of God's love for us: The bad grade we got, the solo that we messed up, the person whose feelings we hurt, the lie we told because we were ashamed of the truth. We are already God's adopted children, and he is our Abba. The Holy Spirit has already been given to us. We already have Christ with us, present in our lives, as close as breath. We are already the body of Christ, drawn together in community through the church as Christ's hands and feet for the sake of the world.

But God's kingdom has not yet been fully realized, because the world remains under the devil's control. The "old evil foe," as Martin Luther called him, is still on the loose, creating chaos wherever possible to pull people away from God. The closer we get, the harder he works. He takes advantage of our fears to get his foot in the door, whenever our faith falters. Every time we weaken and say "yes" to him, even only temporarily, he notches another victory.

In the midst of this, Jesus tells us in the Beatitudes what is coming. That is the fulfillment of God's kingdom, in which all people will be caught up in the inescapable network of mutuality that is God's love.

Even though we live between the already and the not yet, Jesus wants us to know that we are "blessed," meaning supremely happy or joyful, not only for what God has

already done, but even more for what God is still going to do, and that God's people have a tangible understanding of that.

So, we rejoice! Those who are poor in spirit rejoice, because they live as do those who are truly poor, for whom material possessions don't get in the way of their relationship with God. This *is* kingdom living, and we are already there.

Those who mourn rejoice, because even in the midst of trouble they have Jesus by their side to comfort them. They also know that the time of salvation is drawing near when all God's saints will hunger and thirst no more, when God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and when all the angels will sing in cosmic chorus,

“Blessing and glory and wisdom  
and thanksgiving and honor  
and power and might  
be to our God forever and ever!”

Those who are meek rejoice in that their experience of oppression has opened to them the way of humility, which is the only true path to knowing and sharing God's love. Therefore, the future belongs not to the powerful and self-righteous, but to those who are humble.

Those who hunger and thirst for God's justice rejoice, because they know that God will deal with every injustice in the right way at the right time, and that, until then, Christ stands with them in solidarity.

The merciful rejoice in living according to the way of Jesus Christ; their acts of mercy are signs that God's kingdom is already here, and they are blessed in return many times over—as anyone knows who has given a cup of cold water to God's little ones.

The pure in heart rejoice because faithful living requires the inner commitment of the heart to love God completely, by which they will come to know and see God.

And those rejoice who have been persecuted, or criticized, or condemned, or ridiculed for believing in Jesus Christ as the way, the truth and the life, because each experience of persecution brings with it a fresh opportunity to testify to their faith.

Aren't we desperately in need of these words, these seemingly simple words, not just today but every day? When it's becoming almost habitual for power to be abused? When arrogance, self-righteousness, and deception are becoming almost normal? When the growing rate of natural disasters makes us fear for the future of the planet? When civil wars across the globe are putting so many people at the door of starvation and death that relief efforts may at some point be completely exhausted?

Yes. We need the Beatitudes. But we also need them to remind us of our mission. In between the already and the not yet, we still have the church, God's instrument on earth to spread the good news of our present and future. As we take these words of Jesus into our hearts, by our lives, Christ will be made known.

AMEN.