

Sermon for All Saints' Day

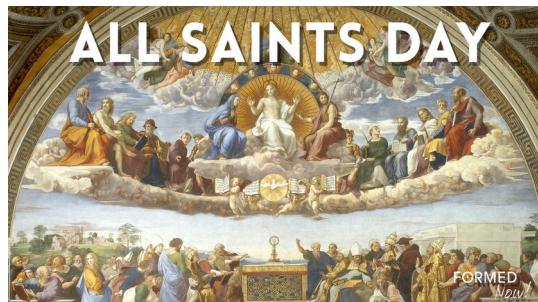
Date: November 7, 2021

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 26 (*Excerpts*)

Epistle Reading: Revelation 21-22 (*Excerpts*)

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5:1-12



Sermon Text: Matthew 5:1-12

Sermon Title: They Shall Be Blessed

Introit: Psalm 31:1, 3, 5; antiphon: Revelation 7:14b

Hymns:

LSB 822 – Alleluia! Let Praises Ring

LSB 677 – For All the Saints

LSB 680 – Thine the Amen, Thine the Praise

LSB 821 – Alleluia! Sing to Jesus

LSB 818 – In Thee Is Gladness

Liturgy:

Creative Worship

Songs:

All Who are Thirsty

Agnus Dei

Beulah Land - Casting Crowns

Come to the Table - Sidewalk Prophets

Fully Known - Tauren Wells

Sanctus (Holy, holy, holy) – Koine

Liturgy:

Creative Worship



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Text: Matthew 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

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

In the readings today, we heard two very different and distinct pictures of the One True Holy Christian Church, the Body of Christ. First, we heard of a glorious Church. A strong city in perfect peace. The picture of perfection. The glory, with no more tears, with the Lamb of God at its center and as its light. It is the Bride of Christ, with waters clear as crystal, and the Tree of life. Who would not want to be in such a place?

Then, from the mouth of Jesus, we also heard of a struggling Church, where there are those who are poor in spirit, who need mercy, who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who are assaulted by wars and battles, who mourn, who are downtrodden, who are persecuted and falsely accused. It is not a glorious picture. It is quite the opposite. It is a picture of struggle and trouble. Maybe we think, ‘who would want to be in a Church like that?’

The most important point is, these are not two different Churches. The first is called the “Church Triumphant” and the second the “Church Militant.” You cannot have one without the other. Both are the true Church on earth. We may think the Church Triumphant equals Heaven, and the Church Militant equals earth. That is not the case. Already here and now, this very day, the Church is triumphant, even though it may not seem that way or look that way.

As Jesus said in the Beatitudes we are blessed. Right here, right now. He didn’t say we *will be* blessed. Jesus said we *are* blessed, even in the struggles, the difficulties and trouble. He didn’t promise easy. He promised blessed.

The Church Militant is already a part of the Church Triumphant, because the outcome of the trials is sure. It is certain. Because the One who triumphed, the One who conquered, is here with us.¹ Jesus is not just in Heaven waiting for us to get there. He is with us here in the battle against sin, death and the power of devil. Where He is, there is no defeat. Where He is, there is no failure. Where He is, there the great company of the Church Triumphant, the angels and the archangels and all the company of Heaven, stands.

So it is as we sang this morning.

1 Matthew 18:20

Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

One Church of all the saints. One church of all who are forgiven and washed clean in the Blood of the Lamb. These are the saints. Saints are not the high and pious, the holier-than-thou people. They are, in fact, not saints at all. All who depend on themselves and what they are able to do are not saints. They are not part of the Church Militant. They are not part of the Church Triumphant.

It is sinners: washed in the Blood of the Lamb, washed and made pure in Holy Baptism, who eat and drink the Body and Blood of Jesus in Holy Communion, who repent and are cleansed by this Blood in Holy Absolution. They are the saints. Listen to Jesus' words:

My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.
Whoever feeds on My flesh and drinks My blood
abides in Me, and I in him.²

These are saints of God because He declares them His saints. God has spoken.

This day is not just about others, or about those who have gone before us. This day is not only about those in Heaven, although it includes them. This day for you. It is All Saints Day, and by faith, that is what you are. By faith we believe. It is a reality that cannot be denied us, even though it cannot be seen.

As you look at yourself, you know you are no saint. You are not a holy person. You know your sins and how great they are. If you don't know that, I'm sure your spouse, your children or others around you could help you with that. If you declare your motives and intentions pure, and yourself pure, you are an enemy of God. You are a decedent of the serpent.³ Purity, blessedness and holiness only come from Jesus.

When you look at the Church, it often doesn't look like a Church of the saints. It is filled with people who fall and sin, who have struggles, and are

² John 6:55

³ Genesis 3:15

weighed down with trials. It is that Church on earth, that is the Church with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. It is those who strive to appear holy, or who declare themselves pure that are not the Church, no matter how much they strive to put on a show. The show, the facade, is a lie.

Jesus said of them:

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.

When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.

If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?
Whoever is of God, hears the Word of God. The reason you do not hear it is that you are not of God.⁴

That is the truth. That is who we are. That is who we should see when we look into the mirror of the Law. That is what we should see when we look only at ourselves.

Right at that point we can go in only two directions. The first is to try to make ourselves look like the saints. To try to make ourselves look like the Church Triumphant on earth. The Church who gets determined. Determined to sin less, and look better, and make the Church more attractive, bigger, shinier and successful.

Remember Jesus' words? Who are blessed? We may not look like the Church Triumphant but we are. In fact, when we try to look like what we think the Church Triumphant should look like, it is time to repent. That would be idolatry. Trying to make the Church what we want it to be, trying to make it into: our image of good; our image of success; our image of saintliness, is to make the Church an idol that replaces the God whom the true Church worships.

4 John 8:43-47

The same is true when we try to make ourselves look like saints. We make: ourselves, our actions, our improvements, and our accomplishments, idols. We have this ideal picture in our minds of what we and the Church should look like, and while it may look good in our mind, if you could see that image as God sees it, it would look like a golden calf.⁵

We need to repent of this idealistic image that we think would impress people. It is repentance that brings us to the other option, the other direction.

The second direction is to know you are not a saint. It is to look not to or at yourself, but to repent and look to the cross. There, bleeding and dying as a condemned criminal, is God's image of success. God says: Look there! There is God's Saint. There is His Holy One. There is the One who makes you holy. That is how the world treats holy ones. It degrades them. It lies about them. It attacked them. It nails them to the cross.⁶

You can't avoid the Church Militant. As long as the Church is in the world, it will be constantly under the attack and assaults of Satan. Constantly bombarded by weakness and suffering. Constantly looking like the poor step child of the wealthy and successful of the world. The Church of God's saints is not the biggest, or the brightest, or the richest, or the most powerful. It is the Church on its knees; the Church under threat; the Church speaking out against sin and evil; the Church living what the world considers the foolishness of God,⁷ that being the Church relying on nothing but the strength of a crucified, condemned criminal.

It is that, not only that, not only the Church Militant, but also the Church Triumphant. Already, here and now, triumphant! That condemned, crucified, criminal, once dead is now alive and with His Church on earth.⁸ He is the One fighting for us. We do not have the strength, but we heard it in Isaiah:

O Lord, you will ordain peace for us;
You have done for us, all our works.⁹

He is the One who does the fighting for us. Fighting with His Word and Sacraments; fighting with His forgiveness. With these these things

5 Exodus 32

6 Romans 6:5

7 1 Corinthians 1:25

8 Romans 6:5

9 Isaiah 26:12

triumphing over sin! With these things He gives life to the dead, even as:

He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity.¹⁰

He makes saints out of sinners, through the forgiveness He earned in His death and resurrection. He strips the enemy of all his power. The empty tomb shows power of sin, death and the devil has been defeated.

So the battle may continue to rage, but it is a battle that has already been won! The Church Militant is the Church Triumphant. What we cannot yet see, but that doesn't make it any less true.¹¹ We are what God says we are. His Word does what it says. It says to you and to me, and to all the faithful who have gone before us: you are forgiven; you are My children, you are My saints. Fight the good fight now,¹² for great is your reward in Heaven.¹³ God has spoken.

We rejoice this day with good reason. No matter what happens to God's saints in this world, we are blessed, because we are forgiven. We are safe, because we are in God's Church, both Militant and Triumphant. Inspired by the saints who have gone before us,¹⁴ and persevering for those still to come. We are one in Christ.

Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**



10 Luther's Small Catechism: The explanation of the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed.

11 1 John 3:1

12 2 Timothy 4:7

13 Matthew 5:12

14 Hebrews 11