

Natalie W. Bell  
 November 1, 2020  
 All Saints Sunday

**For All the Saints**  
**Matthew 5:1-12**

*When Jesus<sup>[a]</sup> saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:*

*<sup>3</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*<sup>4</sup> “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

*<sup>5</sup> “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

*<sup>6</sup> “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

*<sup>7</sup> “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

*<sup>8</sup> “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

*<sup>9</sup> “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

*<sup>10</sup> “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely<sup>[b]</sup> on my account. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

If someone asked you whether you are ***blessed***—***what would you say?***

What does that word mean ***TO YOU?***

What DOES it mean to be ***blessed?***

If you look up ***#blessed*** on social media, you’ll see a pretty incredible picture of what our world considers blessed—

It’s anything from a bikini-perfect body, or ripped abs, a new sportscar, a family with matching outfits, to a large house with beautiful furnishings!

The word blessed is pretty ***ubiquitous*** these days, you can find it on cars, inside homes, on people’s pillows, plaques, necklaces, and t-shirts, and people use the word in everyday language quite frequently.

According to ***Miriam Webster***, the English word blessed or bless-ed,

Means holy, venerated, sacred, hallowed,  
to enjoy happiness, pleasure contentment or good fortune.

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bless#etymology>

The **Greek word blessed, markarios**, means to be blessed, happy, fortunate, well-off. <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongsg=G3107&t=KJV>

The problem with this word that we see everywhere,  
Is that the **WORLD'S idea of being blessed**,  
All those pics on social media of beautiful cars, homes, and people,  
and the **CHRISTIAN notion of blessing**, like here in Matthew 5,  
seem to be two wildly different things.

In the world, to be blessed often means having those things  
that the **WORLD values**—fame, fortune, power, prosperity.

And to some extent we see this in Christian circles as well.  
There is a deep tradition of **prosperity gospel** in America—  
that if you are good enough, faithful enough, you will be blessed—  
and blessing means you'll be safe, happy, healthy, and prosperous!

In reality, **the Scriptures have a different story** to tell about blessing.  
And when **Jesus speaks** of blessing in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5,  
He is saying something really strange.

I think that in the Bible,  
**Paul** might say that blessing comes even in the prison cell, the shipwreck, the  
times of persecution, fear, or famine.

**Abraham** might say that blessing comes in the waiting for years and years for  
God's promises.

**Joseph** might say that blessing comes in the hardships and trials, and how God  
somehow weaves it all together.

**Anna and Simeon** might say that blessing is salvation—  
a salvation that might just pierce your soul.

**Mary, the mother of Jesus**,  
might say that blessing comes in the shock of your life—  
In the good news that is also heartbreaking news—

She might say that enduring the ridicule of being an unwed teenage mom chosen by God, and becoming the mother of the one arrested, tortured, and crucified, right before her very eyes—  
all for the good of the world,  
Was to be blessed!

You know something interesting:  
the word blessed has roots in **Old English** from the **word blood**,  
and the practice of marking or consecrated something with blood.  
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/bless#etymology>

So if blessing doesn't always mean great things and great situations,  
**What does blessing mean here---in Matthew 5,**  
in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount?  
In these famous Beatitudes?  
It doesn't really sound anything like fame, fortune, or prosperity!  
Blessed are those who are....**Poor in spirit? Mourning? Meek? Hungry?**  
**What??**

What is Jesus talking about?  
Blessed are the **merciful, the peacemakers, the persecuted?**  
We live in a world where you're supposed to  
show no mercy, win at all costs, and be the powerful,  
not persecuted!

These blessings **do not sound anything like blessings like we hear about today,**  
Or blessings that you can find on social media.  
They **do not sound like the prosperity gospel** we can find on television,  
Or even the **self-help gospel** we can read about in bestselling books!

These are a **different animal** altogether.  
And they come in Jesus' inaugural sermon in Matthew.  
In Luke Jesus starts preaching as he comes to the Temple and reads from the scroll of Isaiah in Luke 4.  
But here in Matthew, he starts his preaching with the Sermon on the Mount.  
And these blessings are known as the **Beatitudes**.  
Which many modern people have **considered the be-attitudes**.  
Something we are called TO BE.

But are these blessings **really a to-do list** for our Christian faith?  
Are we called to go out and be all these things?

Or is this list **de-scriptive, instead of pre-scriptive?**  
Is this a word of 'go and do',  
or could this be a **word of HOPE?**

What if these blessings are **character traits—of the kingdom of God?**  
What if these are **words of hope** for all who live in the kingdom of God?  
What if these are kind of like **a 'lens'**  
with which we Christians can view the world?  
A very, very **counter-cultural lens.**

In her Oct 27<sup>th</sup> podcast, called *Everything Happens*,  
Professor Kate Bowler of Duke interviews the writer and artist Jan Richardson  
about the idea of Blessing.  
Richardson says that our current, modern idea of blessing is really quite different  
than that of Judeo-Christian blessing.  
We have aligned it too much with wealth and prosperity,  
even with God giving us all kinds of good things. Jan Richardson: Stubborn Hope, Oct 27,  
2020 podcast, *Everything Happens*.

Instead, Richardson offers the idea that blessing in our Christian tradition is really  
about **a 'stubborn hope'.**

**A hope against all odds.**

She uses her own story to illustrate this.

One day her husband went to the doctor for pain in his throat  
and was diagnosed with a brain aneurysm.

He had a massive stroke in surgery and died a couple of weeks later.

He had been her soul mate, a musician, an artist like herself.

And she didn't know what to do after his death.

But God lead her back to her writing and illustrating,  
and she wrote a beautiful **book of blessings**, called the *Cure for Sorrow*.

Not the social media type of blessing.

But the **Christian type of blessing.**

The **real, down-to-earth, down in the pit** type of blessings.

Blessings like these beatitudes.

Which brings us to the saints—all the saints who have gone before us.  
Today on **All Saints Day, we remember the lives and gifts of the saints,**  
And I know that all of you are thinking of those who have gone before us.

I am missing my Dad and his beautiful words,  
My uncle and his care of my aunt,  
My grandma and her hospitality.

I know that Mark is missing his mom,  
And Dub his mom,  
And all of you have empty places at your tables and in your hearts  
Because you have lost loved ones, friends, and family,  
**not just this year, but over all the years.**

And **together we are missing** those  
who have quite literally blessed this family of faith.

I can't help but miss **Suella Barnett** every Sunday,  
because she made our beautiful banners and paraments here in the sanctuary,  
not to mention folding the bulletins each week,  
taking home communion with me to shut-ins,  
and making little knitted gifts for church members.

We've all missed **Phil Lutz** as we bless the Blessing Box,  
and **Betty**, whenever we long for the days of Fellowship events.  
and **Charlie Freeland** for his incredible deep preaching voice, his intellect,  
his involvement in Owasso,  
and the fact that he designed the building we are sitting in right now!

I remember the gifts of **Emily Carson**,  
because if she were here, she'd be reminding us each week to pray for Black Lives  
Matter, the election, the pandemic, and for disasters near and far.

And who can ever forget **Bob Mooney**.  
For his life is perhaps one of the most tragic,  
And yet his joy and love of life was some of the most incredible I've ever seen.  
His lost his teenage son to a car accident, then his wife to suicide,

then his other son to suicide,  
 then he succumbed to a horrible infection,  
 and was taken off life-support as we prayed him into heaven.

And yet Bob was the one who wanted to **host all the church parties!**  
 He loved to **dance!**  
 He wanted to **dress up in Bible costumes** (sometimes a little too much) for VBS!  
 He wanted to **sing** in the choir, even though he couldn't sing!  
 He wanted to **tutor** the kids at Mills, and bring St. Nick alive for kids here,  
 He loved to **stop by the office** just to talk and laugh and joke.  
 He had a **life-sized Halloween character** in his house---all year long!

We laughed and cried as we helped clean out his house after his death—for his  
 was a life well lived.

**ALL because of his faith in Jesus Christ.**

It was his life-line.

**Bob was blessed.**

**Just as all the other saints were blessed.**

**NOT because** they had fame, or wealth, or prosperity.

NOT because they had power or prestige.

NOT because they had good health, or even good fortune.

**But because they knew and loved Jesus Christ.**

They were blessed because they were:

*Poor in spirit*

*Mourning*

*Meek*

*Hungry and thirsty for goodness in this world,*

*Merciful,*

*Pure in heart,*

*Peacemakers in a world of division and pain,*

*Persecuted and mistreated* at times, for they saw the world differently.

And the good news is:

*theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*they will be comforted.*  
*they will inherit the earth.*  
*they will be filled.*  
*they will receive mercy.*  
*they will see God.*  
*they will be called children of God.*  
*theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

***And this path of blessing is also ours,  
 Should we choose to follow in their footsteps.***

The saints can inspire us, and they can show us the way to blessing.

***You know, this week we will vote***, using that great gift and privilege.  
 And this will be a momentous election,  
 coming at a time of such division, and in the midst of a pandemic.  
 But whatever the outcome, whatever happens this week,  
***We are still the people of God.***  
***And God is still on the throne.***

***We are still ONE body of Christ,***  
 not red or blue, Republican or Democrat.  
 Not pro-this or pro-that.

***We are Christians.***

Following our Lord and Savior Jesus,  
 who ***promises to carry us*** through whatever the future holds!  
 And we are still in this life—***TOGETHER. Not separate. Not apart.***

Friends, hear this ***Good News*** of the Gospel: ***we are truly, truly blessed.***  
 Blessed with a God who ***loves us and holds us as ONE family.***  
 A God who gives us the opportunity ***to serve and love this crazy world.***  
 A God who has ***made a covenant*** with us, with this community of faith,  
 to be ***our God, our help, our rock and our fortress.***

As we ***celebrate*** the saints,  
 As we ***seek to follow in the footsteps*** of faithfulness,  
***May we never lose sight of what it means to be truly blessed.***  
 And for this, all God's people said, Amen.