

**1<sup>st</sup> November 2020**  
**All Saints Sunday**  
**Pastor Ben Hentschke**

Someone once posted a status on Facebook. It read: "It is very telling who stops when you have run your car into the ditch on the side of the road. It wasn't what would be termed the cream of society, that's for sure."

The responses to said post were quite interesting to say the least. Some people wanted to know if they were ok, others were asking what happened and if the person who stopped was hoping for a handout in return. Others told stories of how the most unexpected people had helped them out in a time of need.

It turns out that the person had gently backed their car into a ditch while trying to execute a U-turn in a rural area where they lived. Thankfully, they were ok, as was the car, but it was a most unlikely person who stopped to check on them.

As the person described them, they were not the cream of society. We can imagine what they may have been like: perhaps tattooed, worn clothing, run-down car, rough language. But they didn't ask for any handouts.

Instead, the questions were in order: 'Are you okay? Do you have a phone? Is someone coming or can I help?' The person in trouble had what they needed, and someone was on the way to help, but this other person who had stopped to help, was a saint, however unlikely, just when they needed it.

And how many such people do we know, or have we encountered? The unlikeliest of people who would go out of their way to help another.

This morning, we will remember stories of saints, stories like the one I just shared, stories of people who have gone out of their way to teach us, to help us, to change our lives, people who have blessed us in just the right way at just the right times.

These saints that we lift up are often unexpected, and act in unexpected ways, but in doing so, they capture the essence of Jesus words that we heard read for us this morning. These Beatitudes, show the works and ways of a God who is full of surprises.

And Jesus' words as part of his opening of his great 'sermon on the Mount' describe those who find their being in the eternal God. The message of these beatitudes is that it's what we are that really counts, not what we possess or what we have done.

And all these characteristics Jesus describes are a result of our being in Christ. When we really take a look at these promises of the kingdom of God, and also the description of those who receive promises, we find that we get a sneak peak into God's kingdom.

So let me share the beatitudes with you now:

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

**Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.**

**Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.**

**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.**

**Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.**

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

**Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.**

**Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

You see, these beatitudes are primarily about the character of God and God's kingdom, but they are also about the character of us as Christians.

Because God behaves in the way God does, a person would be foolish not to act in the way these beatitudes recommends. And to live the beatitudes is to live in faith.

We have faith that God really does bless the poor in spirit, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers and the persecuted. And when people have such faith in God, they begin to live into that faith in a way that they not only see the blessings of God all around them, but they become a part of those blessings, experiencing those blessings themselves, even as they share them with others. And these are the people we come to know and celebrate as saints.

And as you think of the saints in your life, is that not the kind of people they are? People who are sharing God's blessings in this world and even go out of their way to do so. These are the saints that we celebrate today.

I'm talking about mum and dad, grandma, nana, and Aunt Sue, Uncle Barry; Graham, Joseph, Margaret, Annie – whoever they might be for you.

The celebration of All Saints Day is not just a celebration of the lives of people who are now gone, although we do have a rite later in the service to do just that; it is a celebration of all those people who have walked faithfully with Christ.

It is a celebration of all who have experienced poverty, hunger, grief, and hatred because of the gospel. It is a celebration of all who love their enemies in that profound way that Jesus calls us to: modelling the extravagant generosity that we are all to be about as followers of Christ.

The kingdom that Jesus preached and lived was all about a glorious and absurd selflessness. Think of the very best thing you can do for a person most in need and go ahead and do it! That is basically what he's calling us to do in these words recorded by Matthew.

Think of a blessing you would really like to receive from someone else, and then go and do it for them. Think of the people to who you are tempted to be mean and nasty, and lavish generosity on them instead. It's crazy, but that's what this passage in Matthew is all about, and these are the things that saints do day after day as they seek to follow Christ.

To think of loving in this way and treating people, even our worst enemies, with love and generosity, it seems nearly impossible! But Jesus would not ask it of us if it were not possible, and what we celebrate on All Saints' Day is all the Christ followers who have done these very things.

But how can we do the same? How can we ever move beyond our own selfishness? How can we overcome our quick impulse of resentment, our anger and pride, and the slowness of our sympathy? How can we ever put into practice the actual spirit and conduct which Jesus has put before us in these words to his disciples? In these words to us?

Yet even the least of us have glimpses of what this means. And we have such glimpses in great part because of the people in our lives who have walked with us, who have taught us, who have shown us the way of following the example of Christ themselves.

And meanwhile, we can trust that Jesus, who set the goal so high and far, will have compassion and understanding for the slow steps of each of us who, though our eyes are tuned to him, are still so distant from his ideal.

But I want to flip this whole sermon on its head today. Why? Because sometimes it can be easy to view the Beatitudes – the ‘blessed are’s’ that we are focussing on – as Jesus’ command for us to try real hard to be meeker, poorer, and mourn-ier in order that we might be blessed in the eyes of God. Just as I have explained to you.

And since these Beatitudes are what we often focus on today, on All Saints’ Sunday, it can make the people who are called saints seem so unattainably good and the people who aren’t (that would be us) feel so unworthy.

Plus, it can be easy to look at, say, Mother Teresa and think, ‘Well, she is a saint because she was meek. So if I, too, want to be blessed, I should try to be meek like her.’

Now, don’t get me wrong, we could use a few more people in our work trying to be like Mother Teresa. I just don’t think that the virtue of meekness is what made her considered blessed by Jesus.

But what if the Beatitudes aren’t about a list of conditions we should try to meet to be blessed? What if they are not necessarily the virtues we should aspire to? What if Jesus saying ‘blessed are the meek’ is not instructive, but performative – that the pronouncement of blessing is actually what confers the blessing itself?

Maybe the Sermon on the Mount is all about Jesus’ lavish blessing of the people around him on that hillside, blessing all the accidental saints in this world, especially those who that world – much like ours – didn’t seem to have much time for: people in pain, people who work for peace instead of profit, people who exercise mercy instead of vengeance.

Those people who may not necessarily be considered the ‘cream of society’, because really, we, each and every one of us, we fit into that description.

Maybe Jesus was simply blessing the ones around him that day who didn’t otherwise receive blessing, who had come to believe that, for them, blessings would never be on the cards.

So often we view this passage as a list of things to do better, and we should, following Jesus call to be more and more like him, strive to be better. But what is the gospel focus in this? You see our God, who is slow to anger and abounding in love and is gracious and generous wants to bless

people, so maybe he was handing out blessings to those who would not normally receive blessing.

I mean, come on, doesn't that just sound like something Jesus would do? Extravagantly throwing around blessings as though they grew on trees?

So, this All Saints day, I want you to imagine Jesus standing among us offering some new beatitudes.

Blessed are they who doubt, those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised.

Blessed are they who are spiritually impoverished and therefore not so certain about everything that they no longer take in new information.

Blessed are those who have nothing to offer.

Blessed are the pre-schoolers who cut in line at morning tea.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. You are of heaven, and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are they for who death is not a construct.

Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears could fill an ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like.

Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried.

Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted anymore.

Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else.

Blessed are the motherless, the alone, the ones from who so much has been taken. Blessed are those who 'still aren't over it yet'.

Blessed are those who mourn. You are of heaven, and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone at middle-school lunch tables.

The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex workers and the night-shift street sweepers.

Blessed are the losers and the babies and the parts of ourselves that are so small, the parts of ourselves that don't want to make eye contact with a world that loves only the winners.

Blessed are the forgotten.

Blessed are the closeted.

Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented.

Blessed are the teens who have to figure out way to hide the new cuts on their arms.

Blessed are the meek. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for who life is hard, for Jesus chose to surround himself with people like them.

Blessed are those without documentation.

Blessed are the ones without lobbyists.

Blessed are foster kids and trophy kids and special ed kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are they who know there has to be more than this. Because they are right.

Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people.

Blessed are the burned-out social workers and the overworked teachers and the pro bono case takers.

Blessed are the kind-hearted NRL players and the fundraising trophy wives.

Blessed are the kids who step between the bullies and the weak.

Blessed are they who hear that they are forgiven.

Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it.

Blessed are the merciful, for they totally get it.

And you can imagine Jesus standing there blessing us all because I believe that is our Lord's nature. Because after all, it was Jesus who had all the powers of the universe at his disposal, but did not consider his equality with God something to be exploited.

Instead, he came to us in the most vulnerable of ways, as a powerless, flesh-and-blood newborn. As if to say 'You may hate your bodies, but I am blessing all human flesh. You may admire strength and might, but I am blessing all human weakness. You may seek power, but I am blessing all human vulnerability.'

This Jesus who we follow cried at the tomb of his friend and turned the other cheek and forgave those who hung him on a cross. He was God's beatitude. God's blessing to the weak in a world that admires only the strong.

Today, we remember and celebrate the saints who were happy to follow Christ in the most extravagant ways. We would be lost without such people. But even further, we remember and celebrate God who sent His Son Jesus Christ who blesses us, still today.

Be blessed.

Let's pray...

Blessed are you, O God, for you are holy, gracious and good, the hope of all the faithful.

Empower the meek and encourage the poor. Comfort those who mourn and fill humble hearts with gladness. Give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, peace to the peacemakers, mercy to the merciful, and honour to the despised. Sustain us, each of us, your saints, in our ministry until as last we see our reward: the joy of eternal life with you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

