



All Saints Homily: Luke 6:20-31

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Today is a very significant day. It is the Feast of All Saints, which is one of the seven primary feasts of the Christian year. On this day we celebrate the vast numbers of people across time and space who have followed the way of Jesus in a way that truly made a difference in the world around them. In fact some of our children are dressed as saints this morning and I hope you noticed they processed with the choir and clergy – we have St. Kateri, who was called the Lilly of the Mohawks, and St Anthony, Patron Saint of Lost things, and Rosa Parks, who ignited the Civil Rights Movement. If you see a child in a saint costume, please ask them which saint they are and what they know about their saint. Today is also significant because today we get to celebrate the baptisms of Elana Jirik, Lillian Eastman, and Janny Gothro. And it is two days before the election. Right in the middle of some very intense times in the life of our country, here we are celebrating our connection with heroes and loved ones; and we are celebrating the new beginning that God grants us in Christ in baptism.

How should we understand and experience what are we doing today? Are we in denial of what is going on in the world around us? Are we a fortress shutting that world out so that we can finally get some much-needed peace? Or are we really on to something?

Just to complicate things, in the middle of saints and baptism and the election, we get Jesus' teachings from Luke's gospel, which don't at first blush seem to have anything to do with any of it. In this text Jesus says some things that sound pretty polarizing, if we're honest, and maybe even a bit crazy. Blessed are the poor, he says, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the hungry for they will be filled. And as if that isn't enough Jesus goes on to proclaim woe to the rich, to those who are valued and honored in society. Finally he tells us to love our enemies, to do our enemies what we want them to do to us. In this text Jesus is making very strong statements to get our attention about the way we live and how we assume we are supposed to get our security and value. As my professor Sara Henrich puts it, Jesus is teaching us that all our

efforts to protect ourselves and keep what we think of as “ours” will fail – and so, Jesus is inviting us to another way.

And we need another way. We adults, and our children who are dressed as saints, and those being baptized today, need a way that transcends the violence and fear that characterize our country’s political discourse right now. This way of living is inaugurated in baptism and carried out in the lives of the saints we celebrate today. This way of living is characterized by a radical trust in God’s love as the true source of our value and safety, so much that we are empowered to love others, even our enemies.

The truth is that our security and our value cannot come from our political candidate of choice winning the election, and our security and value cannot come even from the resources we’ve worked so hard to save over the years. Our security and value can only come from the God whose Spirit, through Christ, gives us the power to love—even to love enemies. Our security comes from the God in Christ who always offers us new beginnings, grace, and blessing precisely where we run out of our own resources.

So this church is not and cannot be a fortress trying to shut the crazy world out. Instead we are called to be a demonstration plot, as imperfect as we are, of what God’s kingdom is like. We are called to live a way that grants hope to this world. We are actually what the Bible calls saints – not superheroes, just ordinary followers of the way of Jesus. Of course we aren’t any better than anyone else. We’re saints because we try to cooperate with the God who uses imperfect people like you and me to lavish love in the middle of hatred, light in the dark, and hope that God can make a way where there is no way. No matter what happens on November 8, on November 9 you and I are called to model the way of love, even loving our enemies, in the power of God’s Spirit with whom we are sealed at baptism.

Well what does that look like in practice? Last year when there were all those protesters on the North Side in Minneapolis because of the police shooting of Jamar Clark, a number of my friends invited me to go attend a prayer vigil there. I debated. I do think black lives matter. I know that systemic racism continues to undermine the welfare of people of color at all levels. But I also support the police officers who risk their lives every day to keep people safe, and that many of them do use restraint in dangerous situations. I wondered if I went to this vigil, would I be taking sides in a way that upheld one value while denying the other? Isn’t life constantly confronting us with choices where we aren’t sure what to do, aren’t sure how best to love?

In the end I went to the prayer vigil because I follow the way of Jesus, and I believe Jesus calls us to go where the pain in this world is and stand with those who are suffering, and to model a

third way. The way of Jesus affirms we are all a mix of good and evil – there are not saints in one group and sinners in the other: the line between good and evil runs straight through each of our hearts. Now, did I make a difference at that prayer vigil? I don't know. I do know that I went to that vigil expecting a lot of the kind of polarizing words and accusations that you hear on the news. But what I heard was very different. I heard a lot of kindness and humility and respect instead. So even though I went to this prayer vigil because I wanted to be where the pain in the world is, because I figured that's what followers of Jesus ought to do, they ended up teaching me about love and respect across lines of difference. I went there thinking I would bring reconciliation. Instead I discovered God's Spirit was already there ahead of me working reconciliation through those who were living that conflict every day. It was a humbling and life-giving experience for me.

These people praying in the 4th precinct turned my assumptions upside down, and that seems about right. Jesus invites us to transcend the categories with which we so strongly identify – rich and poor, black and white, Republican and Democrat, even parent and child. He calls us instead to identify as followers of Jesus, Beloved children of God, who in the power of God's Spirit are called to love without conditions. Now I'm not saying we all need to go out and look for a protest to attend, unless that's your specific call in this world. I am saying we are all already situated in lots of places where we encounter people who differ from us, and those differences are getting more heated. As people called to be ordinary and imperfect saints, we need to model a different way of living for our children and for the world. We just need to be willing to show up, wherever we are called to be. We need to trust that our value and safety come from God and nowhere else, and then to be willing to love radically. We can do this because God is already there ahead of us, working reconciliation and healing and forgiveness. We just need to find the indicators of God's movement and cooperate – even when it is very difficult.

Let us celebrate fiercely that God's kingdom is alive and growing, even if that seems impossible in this divisive world. Let us allow God to help us let go of fear, and embrace fully the reconciliation to which we are called in Christ.