All Saints Episcopal Church

Steenrijk

Heelsumstraat at Leidenstraat

November 1, 2026

All Saints' Sunday

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

DRAFT

"Is Love Limited?"

The Holy Gospel according to

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he

began to speak, and taught them, saying: “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 receive 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 for righteousness' sake,

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people 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 in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Dear Lord, may we find blessedness in the way we serve the last, the least, the lost, and the lonely. Amen.

Last Sunday we received Jesus' command to love others as we love ourselves—that we are commanded by Christ actually to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. But that poses the question of what 'loving ourselves' actually means. Today in the Beatitudes we learn how we can love ourselves—we love ourselves by being blessed by God, not by some inner buildup of how great we are, how loveable we are, since indeed, sometimes we are not all that loveable. So, the Beatitudes give us a direct way of becoming loveable by God

and thus loveable to ourselves, and in turn we can love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Being blessed, blessed by God, is something we do only by and with the grace of God, but we have to be willing to 'go along' with God's will. Loving, loving, is a circular pattern that often goes more or less un-scrutinized. For example, if we are unmerciful to others, how can we seek mercy from God?—that is to say, if we are not merciful to others, how can we believe that God loves us for such behavior? And so on with the rest of the Beatitudes.

So, the suggestions I have seen, some sorts of ‘pop’ psychology, in how others say we just ‘have’ to love ourselves, that we ‘must’ love ourselves, make little sense, since, maybe as I said, we are sometimes travelling down a road of being un-loveable. The Beatitudes help us to correct our errant journey and to set us on a better pathway. And when, with God’s help, we turn ourselves around to become blessed, we can then become a blessing to others; and we can find a depth of love for others which we may not have had before, or maybe we may

not have had a depth of loving others more than superficially. Becoming blessed by God is the Way, The Path, by which we find love for ourselves, and thus how we become released from our inner weaknesses to love others. And, of course, when we are blessed by God, that is a way we know that indeed we do love God. As I said, this is a circular process. And we need to find our way into this process of becoming blessed—it is a 'wheel of love' that we need to climb aboard.

The weightiness of Christ's teachings to his disciples of the Beatitudes is emphasized by his "sitting down", a posture of serious teaching. The Greek word used by the gospel writer for Christ's posture is "kathisantos", the only place in the entire New Testament where this unique word is used, and which can be construed as 'gather around—you saints'--"kath" as in 'gather around', as in "kata", "around", and "santos" 'the saints', a combination of a Greek preposition, "kata", and a Latin noun, "santos"; the preposition "kata" is

perhaps a bit hidden as “kathi”, where the Greek letter theta is substituted for the “tau”, which does occur in limited language usage, and where instead of the normal Greek word, “hagios” for ‘saint’ or ‘saintly’, the Latin word “santos” is used to show an endearing presence of those Jesus considered “saints” in this cruel Roman world which was about to crucify him. Jesus was rounding up his followers to give them a very special and weighty teaching, and indeed the disciples realized he was summoning them as a king summons his most

important subjects, his closest followers. The giving of the Beatitudes was not a casual affair; it was a time of sincerity and directness and gravity—the Beatitudes were not just a set of ‘wise sayings’ casually dropped by the Master as he was ‘on his way’. Jesus was preparing them for a world that would seem to any outside their ranks as completely ‘topsy-turvy’. How can the meek inherit anything? much less the entire earth. These are not some simpleminded statements—they are statements of not only about this life, but

of eternity, of ever-lasted-ness, a foretaste of the ‘world to come’ which has not yet come for us in this life. These Beatitudes are words which describe not only how we are to live in the now, but how we will live in the hereafter, where mercy will be the rule--not the occasional or the exceptional; where purity will be in everyone forever--not just in a few now and then; where peace will indeed fully ‘flow like a river’. The Beatitudes are describing a world of which we only can catch a slight glimpse, ‘as in a mirror darkly’ as

the Apostle Paul once wrote in First Corinthians, Chapter Thirteen, Verse Twelve. The Beatitudes not only are how we are to live in this world, but the Beatitudes describe a future world which we are called to embrace and enact in this sinful world, but which we can only hope to try to catch hold of by the grace of God Almighty, a world we will see clearly only at our end, should we be so blessed by God's grace.

We can love ourselves only as we practice living by the Beatitudes. Any deviation from them is not on the track

of eternity; any exception is earthy; any other way of living does not point to our ever-loving God who somehow loves us even when we fall astray to God's commands. The Beatitudes are the ultimate guides for our lives.

Jesus speaks to "his disciples" on "the mountain" just as God spoke to Moses on "the mountain" to give us the Ten Commandments which we often casually treat as the Ten Suggestions. We do not hear the thunder or see the lightning on this mountain of Jesus, we only hear the pure calm voice of the Messiah. But I

have learned from some of my Muslim acquaintances that the Muslim religion does not contain these Ten Commandments; so we Christians and Jews are in a world in which the other religions and non-religions consider the Ten Commandments to be of little weight if of any weight at all. So, in the extreme parts of some religions, terrorist activities are not condemned since their understanding of religion does not specifically foreswear the murder of those outside their faith, for example. Murder is reserved for infidels, for those

outside that particular extreme view of their religion, even though many if not most followers of Muhammad try to follow the Ten Commandments and indeed at times put the rest of us to shame because of our own casual treatment of God's ways.

The final touch of the Beatitudes is in the last statement Jesus makes, which one may think to trip over lightly: "for your reward is great in heaven" is a translation of a more literal, "for your wages are vast in the heavens". This points us to where all these seemingly

unfair and even impossible charges to us become balanced “in the heavens” where only God and God’s people live. Sometimes the “pay off” is not in this world but in the next, where there will be no more ‘pain and suffering’.

In our reading today from Revelation Chapter Nine, Verses Thirteen through Seventeen, “Then one of the elders [before “the throne” of God] addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” I said to him, “Sir, you are the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “These are

they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty.

The trials and tribulations which we will find in the present age are passing, fleeting; but the permanence which we have in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior is solid and everlasting. Though death may catch us unawares, we are still to live in the Beatitudinal life--giving where we will not get back in this life, loving even though we will often find that we are not loved back, seeking for a

righteousness that we may never see attained on this side of the grave. We will be blessed not necessarily in this life, but in the life to come. But as we live into the Beatitudes we will be proclaiming to others the Messiah we espouse, the Messiah we follow, the Messiah we show forth by our deeds and actions.

Amen.

“Is Love Limited?”

Matthew 5:1-12

All Saints’ Sunday (A)

November 1, 2026

Description:

In day-to-day living, we are called to be different, counter-intuitive, and even possibly ‘totally out of it’ as viewed by the rest of society if we actually follow the Beatitudes of Christ. They confound

the world. They challenge the way we see things, and they totally upset the way most people think things ‘ought’ to work.

Tags:

Moses, ten, commandments, beatitudes, meek, poor, peacemakers, peace, Jesus, Christ, disciples, law, love, neighbor, blessed, Christians, Jews, Old, Testament, New, Revelation, terrorism, religious, non-religious, ordeal, psychology, circular, God, blessedness, suggestions, teach, teaching, Greek

(Below is another sermon.)

St. Stephen's Episcopal ProCathedral

35 South Franklin Street

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18701

All Saints Day Observed

Sunday, November 2, 2014

A Sermon by the Rev. Joseph Parrish

"Let all the saints come marching in"

DRAFT

The Holy Gospel according to

Matthew 5:1-12

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. Amen.

From March of the Year 303 until the end of the Year 313 A.D., the church commemorated the lives of each person who had been killed in the great persecution of the Roman Emperors of the time, but in short order the number of days to commemorate their valiant deaths overwhelmed the numbers of days in the year.

The great fifth century church historian, Eusebius, speaks of large numbers of men in groups from ten to one hundred, with young children and women, being put to death in one day, and not for just a few days or a short time, but for a long series of years. Eusebius describes the wonderful ardor of the faithful, rushing one after another to the judgment seat before the Roman magistrate and confessing themselves Christians, and with joy they received their sentence, with truly Divine energy they endured for hours and days the most

excruciating tortures; scraping, racking, scourging, quartering, crucifixion head downwards, not only without complaining, but singing and offering up hymns and thanksgiving to God till their very last breath. Those who did not die in the midst of their tortures were killed by the sword, fire, or drowning, Eusebius reports.

Finally, the church decided to put the commemoration of all the saints who had been martyred on one day, All Saints Day, and we have continued this tradition up until the present. We no

longer require saints to be martyrs as was the case in the fourth century, but we remember all who have died in the faith in the past as being the saints of our own time and day. But the day itself was first won by the letting of the blood of thousands of Christians during terrible persecutions.

The beheadings of both Christians, Jews, and Muslims bring to mind the terrors of the fourth century in bold highlights of the terrors that are now taking place to us there and even in our our own state and country in the twenty-

first century. Saints as martyrs unfortunately still abound and are facing severe cruelty as we sit here today, so let us remember those who are suffering terribly at the hands of those who proclaim a God that hates, not the God we know as the God of love.

There is an ancient lintel in the ceiling of the Cloisters Museum in New York City that depicts the Palm Sunday procession. At the head of the procession is Jesus, then there are children and adults in first century middle-eastern dress. But then there

follows a large group of people in twelfth century European clothing. The artist was saying that we all are in the grand procession of God. There is actually a gigantic procession following Jesus into heaven. There is a long line composed of the millions of Christians from every age who have walked to the beat of the cross, taking the brunt of the evil of the world, denying themselves for the sake of the gospel. These are people faithfully living lives which helped others see the light of Jesus Christ. The procession is actually more than two

thousand years long, because we must include the Old Testament saints as well--Abraham and Moses and David and so on. Jesus descended to the dead on Holy Saturday after Good Friday to preach the gospel to them as well, and they too joined in the grand procession following their Lord and our Lord into heaven. Let all the saints come marching in!

The Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC, is a large black polished piece of granite that rises up from the ground on the left side. On the huge stone are the names of the more

than fifty thousand people who lost their lives fighting in the Vietnam War. But when one looks at the names on the stone one begins to make out one's own image staring back. We too have been redeemed by the blood of the martyrs of war. Through them we too are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb of God whose blood takes away the sins of the world. Through the saints who have gone before us we are challenged to do our best, to live our best, to pray our best. The saints who have gone before us have shown us the way.

A bishop of Sweden once said, "Saints are those who make it easier for us to believe in God." And we too strive to make it easier for others to believe in God and in his Son Jesus Christ. Let us call to mind our childhood Sunday School teachers, our parents and our grandparents, our church pastor, all of those who have preceded us in the faith. We see ourselves reflected in them.

The apostle Paul said saints are members of the body of Christ. The sage Mark Twain said, "Heaven goes by favor not by right. If it didn't, your dog would

get in and you would be left out." Heaven does go by the favor of God; we call it grace. By grace are we saved through faith.

The beatitudes which we heard in the gospel according to Matthew this morning tell us about blessedness. The Greek word used in the New Testament for "blessed" means "fortunate," "happy," "being in a privileged situation," "being well off." Blessedness is the quality of living in our struggles in the now what will be reversed in the heaven of later. We mourn now,

lamenting the present situation of many of God's people, but not resigning ourselves to the present condition of the world as being final. We are gentle now, meek, reversing the world's ideas of kingship, participating in the renewal of the earth which one day we shall inherit. We seek the justice of God for those who lack justice, actively doing the will of God in our society. We are merciful not only in attitude but in concrete acts of mercy towards those who need us to care for them and even toward our enemies. We have a pure heart with single-minded

devotion to the one true God. First century Roman emperors called themselves 'peacemakers,' even as they attacked cities and whole cultures. But the first century Jewish Christians would not participate in the fighting against the Roman siege of Jerusalem. Theirs however was not a passive attitude of peace but a positive action for reconciliation. Those who were unjustly persecuted because of their commitment to righteousness were walking in the footprints of their Lord and Savior, who suffered death at the hands of those who

did not love God. He and they accepted the badge of belonging to the saints of God who seemed to live foolish lives because they saw their vindication would come from God and not from their own hands. Blessed are the saints of God. There may be humiliation in the present, but the glory to come will be immeasurable. The beatitudes actually describe the life of Christ himself who took upon himself the form of a slave that all through him might find eternal life.

Genuine faith works through love. There is a promise of ultimate victory for those who participate in God's cause. Joy breaks through our tears and sufferings because we see the light of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

There are probably many surprises in store for us. Unlikely candidates will probably get God's special attention. It is also said that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church. They were not forgotten by God, just as we will not be forgotten by God. Our cherished friends

and family members have gone before us, but one day we will see their faces in the kingdom which has no end.

The beatitudes are the good news of God. We have been given a wonderful gift by those who have preceded us into God's kingdom. They have shown us the way. Let us follow them and the lives they lived. Let our imaginations be enlivened and our sensitivities be reformed. We are called to serve together in the kingdom of God, not in competition with one another. There is plenty of work to go around!

Some of that work is the work of prayer. While I was a seminarian at St. James' Church in Manhattan I discovered a prayer group who met every week for years to pray for the nuclear disarmament of the then Soviet Union and the United States. They prayed long and hard for the day the Iron Curtain would be torn down. They prayed for the reduction of weapons of mass destruction in the nuclear arms race. They prayed for each individual member of the disarmament negotiating teams of both sides. And in the end their prayers

were indeed answered. Those peacemakers through prayer will surely be called children of God.

Writer Warren Wiersbe said, “God doesn’t bless us to make us happy; God blesses us to make us a blessing.”

Saints are contemporary Christians just as much as the Christians of the past. If we do not seek to escape authentic personhood but live as the saints of God by our disciplined obedience to the teaching and example of our Lord, then we too will find our glory right up ahead. Our lives need to be lived in response to

the love of God for us, not putting ourselves out in front in an effort to gain God's favor. God first loved us, and then we love God.

The beatitudes call us to a complete reversal of the values of most societies, including our own. We are not called on to be victims, but as we are sometimes victimized we have the ultimate blessings of God with us. Saints are kingdom people. Let us all strive to continue being people of the loving kingdom of Jesus Christ which knows no end.

Amen.