



Sunday November 1, 2020
Matthew 5:1-12 (All Saints Sunday)

Pastor Tony Acompanado

Our custom on All Saints Day is to remember those in our faith community and in our personal lives who have died in the last year. Since the time when we said our final goodbyes, our lives may have gone on, but we are also aware that they will never be the same. Death leaves our minds filled with memories of what once was but will never be again. And while death may be a reality that we all know to be true, it nevertheless remains difficult to comprehend because of the void it leaves behind. Death leaves us feeling empty with sadness and longing for comfort that comes far too slowly in our search for understanding and peace.

All Saints Day gives us a moment to grieve those we have lost but also to move into thanksgiving for their lives, their presence among us, and even more – for their place now among the saints gathered in the nearer presence of God. So, we take time this day to speak their names and do it with somberness, dignity, reverence and joy.

However, sometimes as we recognize this day, I think we do so with a narrowed vision of loss. So, I'd like us to consider expanding our vision of who else might be impacted by this day as well. Because here's the thing, loss that deserves notice and demands comfort comes from many places, not only death. It comes in leave-takings, as we depart for a new job and leave friends and colleagues behind. It comes as high school graduates head off to colleges and in many other directions as they begin their lives as young adults. It comes as you slowly lose a loved one to Alzheimer's. It comes in the loss of employment or dignity. It comes in the loss of freedom and independence. It comes from struggles with illness of both body and mind. It comes from the exhaustion of caring for a child with special needs or a parent whose health is failing and the occasional recognition of all the things given up in order to offer that care. It comes from disappointment at home or work or school, of dreams deferred or hopes dashed.

It comes to us lately in the midst of a pandemic that highlights all that we love and have had to let go of – family gatherings, attending kids and grandkids events, homecomings, graduations, and the loss of worshipping in-person with our faith community while singing praises together to our God. These deep losses of connection, whether a result of death or otherwise come at us from so many sources, and I think there's incredible value for us in recognizing together how this day could address all the various losses that we've encountered.

So, for a moment, I'd like you reflect on some of the losses you have experienced and have seen others experience over the past year. And I wonder if we might also imagine that the "saints" are not only those who are robed in white and gathered in the presence of God but also each of us – as we too have come, or perhaps are still coming, through ordeals both great and small. To all those who are struggling to find hope or healing, God's promise to "wipe away every tear" is an encouraging word all of us can appreciate hearing on this day.

See, the beautiful thing about promises is that they don't just describe things; they actually have the capacity to create the reality they name. Promises set things in motion, which is why they're so important. When we're struck in grief or loss, we have little capacity to imagine, let alone move toward a future not dominated by these difficult realities. But as we hear God's words of promise, they have the power to create hope that can enable all who hear them, to take our first steps toward a future not defined by our past.

In the same way, we can hear the words of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount not as a record of what Jesus said long ago, but rather as words spoken to us now. Notice not only that Jesus blesses *all kinds* of people, but especially the kinds of people who we don't typically see as being *blessed* – the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn, and so on. In general, the world gives these people little regard, just as few notice many of *our* silent losses and grief – and yet, Jesus names them *all* as blessed.



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The Beatitudes are words of life for those who have been discouraged and beaten down by the loss and death in the world. Take for instance how Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount – “*Blessed Are.*” He didn’t say, *one day* you will be blessed – but ***are blessed*** – even now, even here. Why is that? Because blessing isn’t like the flu shot. Blessing doesn’t immunize you from pain or loss, and it’s not a guarantee of safe passage through this life unscathed. Rather, it’s a sense of fullness, of contentment, of joy that is like, but also goes beyond ordinary happiness. And like love and hope and so many other things, it can’t simply be willed into existence but rather springs forth in response to the love and promises of another.

And so, to hear the truth and depth of God’s promises this day has incredible power – that God sees you, that God knows the grief that weighs down your hearts, the depression or addiction that oppresses you, and all the challenges and uphill struggles that you are facing.

My friends, we may live in a world filled with broken promises, but we have received a sure and certain hope in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We can trust with confidence in God’s grace filled promises because Jesus exchanged his life for ours that we might be reconciled and have eternal life. Embedded deep within that promise is the assurance that one day we will reside in a holy dwelling place prepared for us where there is no more pain, no more sadness, no more death and where we will be reunited once again with all those who have gone before us.

As we remember and honor those who have gone before us, we celebrate the unbreakable communion between past, present, and future. We draw comfort, resilience, and hope from the fact that countless others have mourned, hungered, thirsted, and grieved in years past – and gone on from their struggles to the fullness of life in God’s presence.

So, in the days, months and years to come, I encourage you to speak your loved one’s names and speak them often. If you wish to honor the memory of these amazing saints that you were privileged to walk this journey alongside – then do so by living your life according to the best example they set for you. Each time you speak their names they live on in the stories that you share, the kindness you offer, the forgiveness you extend, the laughter that comes forward and the tears that are sure to fall as you remember them, and celebrate the faithful lives they lived and shared with each of you.

On this day we give thanks to God for the blessing of Carl, Carolyn, Ellie, Vicki, Lee, Al, Pat, Burt, and all those saints we hold precious in our hearts. Thanks be to God for the time we were given to share with them as their family and friends. Thanks be to God for every experience, every memory, and the faithful examples they left us to follow. Most importantly, we give thanks to God for the gracious gift of Jesus and the promise of eternal life that reminds us that we too are blessed as those God names and claims as God’s Beloved. And therefore, as children of God, even now in our deep suffering we can live with confidence and hope because death does not have the final word. Thanks be to God. Amen.