



All Saints Sunday-November 1, 2020
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Romans 6:1-5 and Matthew 5:1-12

"Your Reward as a Saint"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

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:

This scene sounds like the repeat of a similar scene that the disciples had been told about that took place on another mountain. They had heard the story of when Moses went up Mt. Sinai and when he came back down the mountain, he also began to speak. Moses' words from God were the Ten Commandments. When Moses spoke these words, he told the people what they should do and what they should not do concerning their words and actions with God and their neighbors. After watching Jesus go up the mountain, the disciples may have wondered if Jesus was going to teach like Moses.

*This scene of Jesus teaching reminds me also of a time when I was in school about 45 years ago. Of all my years in school, I would have to admit 7th grade was my least favorite year. I don't remember the term middle school ever used in our school. As I recall, there wasn't a transition from grade school to junior **high** school that middle school might help with. The step from 6th grade to 7th was a big step and it wasn't easy. There were so many changes from the comfort of grade school that I had become accustomed to. One of the biggest transitions for me was going from one teacher for most of the subjects in 6th grade to having a different teacher for almost every subject in the seventh grade and the uncertainty of what this meant. I remember a couple of times in particular when I had several tests on the same day to prepare for and I remember studying hard the night before using my time on the long bus ride to the Colton school to get ready for them. I recall feeling fairly confidently prepared as I walked into the school. Then I went to my first class for the day which just had a reading assignment that I just skimmed over. The teacher for this class had a reputation for scaring his students into obedience. I recall him entering the room. He looked at his class for what seemed to be an eternity without speaking and then he said, "Take out a sheet of paper." We all knew immediately what this meant. We were going to take a quiz to see if we had done our reading. There wasn't going to be any grace experienced by anyone by not being called on. I still recall the sick feeling hitting my stomach because I hadn't planned on any extra quizzes for the day. I*

wondered to myself, hadn't this teacher communicated with the other teachers so that this extra unexpected, unplanned, unnecessary burden wouldn't be given? At least not today! After experiencing this a few times, I always was on edge when this teacher came into the room and looked at us before speaking and I wondered what would be the first words out of his mouth as he began to teach.

Maybe Jesus' disciples had this feeling when Jesus sat down and was about to speak to them. Was Jesus going to place a greater unexpected, unnecessary burden on them like Moses did when he came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments? Was Jesus going to give his disciples more rules to follow or more work to do? Were their hearts going to sink or were their spirits going to be lifted when Jesus began to speak to them? But you just heard what Jesus taught them. Instead of Jesus sitting down and looking at each of his disciples in their eyes and saying, "Take out a sheet of paper.", the first word from his mouth was "Blessed".

"Blessed" is how Jesus began his long sermon which is known as his "Sermon on the Mount." Jesus breaks the usual way that a sermon is often delivered. A typical sermon doesn't often begin with a promise. A sermon certainly may convict you of your failings, but it should end with you feeling guilt and shame for what you have done wrong or failed to do. We all are hungering and thirsting for some good news these days. And I'm not too sure if this week tops the chart since the pandemic began for the number of people thirsting for good news from Jesus. I too have been thirsting for good news this week and could hardly wait for 5:30 this morning to have a fellow preacher post his service so I too could begin this day with a promise. This may have been the kind of week Jesus knew his disciples were having so after looking at his disciples, he didn't surprise them by saying "Take out a sheet of paper. Let's see what you have learned this week." Instead, in one word he delivered a promise to them when he said, "Blessed".

This list of "blessed's" that Jesus taught to his disciples, however, may not have been what they expected or wanted to hear. They, like you, had hoped to hear that "blessed" means wealth, happiness, prosperity, receiving respect from others, being fully satisfied with your job, and a big dose of self-confidence for all to admire. But these were not blessings that Jesus delivered. Instead, Jesus said, blessed are you who are troubled in mind, hunger, and thirst for righteousness, those who are in mourning, those who are persecuted and those who speak evil against you.

After Jesus delivered this unusual blessing he said, "Your reward is great in heaven." For many whose race on this earth is nearly over this indeed is good news. But Jesus gave this promise to his disciples and gives this promise to you who are in the beginning or in the middle of the race.

Jesus gives this promise to people who are tired from running the race of this life. Jesus gives this promise to ALL saints.

On this All Saints Sunday, we remember that God has declared you "blessed" in your baptism. And our heavenly father never forgets the promise he makes to his saints. Paul declared from the reading from Romans today, "Do you not know that all of us that have been baptized into Christ were baptized into his death? Yes, in baptism, you have already died! Sin, the devil, and when you quit breathing on this earth have no power over you. You have died with Christ and since we have been buried with Christ by baptism into death, just as Christ was raised, we will certainly be raised with Christ.

Hear this good news today, Christ has named you blessed today. Not because of the difficulty you may be facing today, but because Jesus is with you in whatever difficulty you may be experiencing. This is your reward today and forever. Amen.