



“Sanctified”

All Saints Sunday
Saturday & Sunday, November 4 - 5, 2017
All Services
The Reverend Jennifer A. Crist
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Matthew 5:1-12

"Have you met Mike and Jimmy yet?" A 78-year-old Guatemalan woman, named Doña Gloria, asked this question of me as I arrived with a team to the orphanage we go to in Guatemala. Mike and Jimmy, Mike and Jimmy....I was trying to remember kids with those names.... I knew one of the boys was named Miguel, but Mike? That's not a Guatemalan name.



"No," I told her. I have not met Mike and Jimmy yet.



"Well," she said, rolling up her sleeves. "This is Mike. And this is Jimmy." And when she did that, she somehow made her biceps jump up and down. I don't know how she did that. I have tried many times and still can't do that. Of course, at that point, the whole team had burst into laughter; some even to the point of tears.

And that was our introduction to the spunky grandmother named Gloria. And dozens of our

team got to meet Gloria, and Mike, and Jimmy over the years. Gloria always had a twinkle in her eye and a hug all who arrived at the orphanage, whether they were a street boy with bad habits or a disoriented American. *(Blessed are the pure in heart)*



for



I had assumed for years that Gloria was a relative of the directors of the orphanage. I was later surprised to find out that she was not. She was actually the mother of one of the workers at the orphanage. In time, I learned that Gloria's husband had died in a bus accident when Gloria was a young mother of two girls ages 4 and 6. *(Blessed are those who mourn)* After her husband died, she worked as a secretary for the Guatemalan Department of Agriculture and raised those two girls on her own. *(Blessed are the meek)*

After Gloria had retired, her daughter Monica was hired to work at the orphanage, and Gloria tagged along to help. When children were sick or had an emergency, like an accident, which you can imagine happens often when 65 boys are living together, Gloria would often accompany them to the hospital, sometimes sitting up all night with them. *(Blessed are the merciful)*



Gloria would also go with children when they had a court audience. The children would get really anxious when they went before the judge. Gloria went to be a peaceful presence, though also to be an advocate for these children most of whom have been abused or abandoned *(Blessed are the peacemakers; blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice)*

This passage we heard from Matthew this evening/morning is a familiar one, isn't it? We often call the story with all of these "blessed's" the Beatitudes. They come at the beginning of Jesus' famous "Sermon on the Mount," which takes up three chapters in Matthew's gospel. This "Sermon" takes place at the beginning of the story of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was baptized in the Jordan; then went into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil; and then began ministry, calling his first disciples. The disciples went up the mountain with Jesus and began listening to this long sermon where Jesus teaches and really re-interprets scripture and "the law" to his followers.



Jesus is teaching the disciples what it means to be a disciple, to follow him. And he begins with this list of "blessed's" that I imagine were a bit confusing to the disciples. Sometimes this word is confusing to us too.



I think that word, "blessed," or "blest," is a loaded word in our American culture. Well-intentioned people seem to throw around the term, "blessed," whenever they are feeling good about something in their life. When things are going well, finances are stable, health is robust, people describe themselves as "blessed." Have you heard this? I hate to admit it, but I know I have thrown around the word "blessed" too. The problem with using "blessed" in this way is that it implies that when we are having a hard

time in life, when we are struggling with finances or family or our health, well, then we are not "blessed."

And this interpretation of "blessed" was exactly the problem in Jesus' world too. In Jesus' world, it was commonly thought that those who were the "have's" were so because God favored them. They were "blessed." The emperor, the government officials, the scribes, the high priests, the Pharisees, and the landowners.... **these** were the ones considered blessed, placed into their positions by God, receiving divine favor.... the fortunate ones. And so what were the "have not's," the peasants, the poor, sick, blind, lame, the persecuted, females and slaves? Well these people were "not blessed." They must have done something to anger God, something to deserve their lot in life.



But if we look back at this passage from Matthew, Jesus is describing the exact situations of the "have not's" as "blessed." Those who are disheartened, mourning, experiencing injustice, conflict, and persecution are the "blessed" ones. Here Jesus describes those who are blessed as those who are suffering, as those who recognize and name the brokenness in our world and who struggle to do something about it.





What Jesus was teaching was the opposite of what the culture was telling the people of his time. What Jesus was teaching probably sounded outrageous to the people. Jesus was telling them that not only were they important to God, but that God was with them in their suffering, actively working alongside them to restore wholeness where there is brokenness.

One of my favorite theologians is an 89-

year-old Peruvian Dominican priest named Gustavo Gutierrez. He is considered one of the founders of liberation theology, which developed in the 1960's in Latin

America and focused on biblical commitment to and solidarity with the poor. Gutierrez describes the Sermon on the Mount as laying out the ethical demands that a Christian must meet with the Beatitudes specifically describing discipleship. He notes that each category of the "blessed's" is matched with a kingdom gift, given by God.

"Justice is the work of God and therefore must be the work of those who believe in God. It implies a relationship with the Lord - namely, holiness; and at the same time a relationship with human beings..."



Those who are poor in spirit, receive the kingdom of heaven; those who mourn, receive comfort; those who are meek or humble receive an inheritance; those who are hungry and thirsty for justice, receive satisfaction; those who are merciful, receive mercy; those who are pure in heart and sincere, receive God's attention; those who are peacemakers, receive adoption as God's children; and those who are persecuted for justice's sake, receive the kingdom of heaven.

All of these gifts that are received are part of the kingdom of God.....wholeness, restoration, inclusion into God's family, mercy.... these are all part of what we experience when the kingdom of God comes to us. Gustavo Gutierrez describes the kingdom as a gift, but also a demand. He says, and I quote, "It is a freely given gift of God and it calls for conformity to God's will to life. This is what is asked of disciples, that they live a life situated between gratuitousness and demand."



We are called to live a cruciform life in tension between being grateful for what we have been given, while at the same time in solidarity with others, striving to work toward a world where all will have what they need. How do we do this? Jesus hints at that in the "Beatitudes" passage.

Did you notice that the list of the first eight of the "blessed's" are in the third person? Blessed are they.... blessed are the ones who.... but look at the ninth "blessed." That one is in the second person plural. Jesus is speaking directly to the

disciples gathered on the mountain. Blessed are YOU ALL 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.

Woah! This is delayed gratification for sure! Jesus is saying that it is risky to be a disciple, because God's kingdom and justice are inextricably linked. We will struggle in life together, while trusting God's promise that the kingdom of God is drawing near.

Blessed are you, and you, and you, for Jesus has redeemed you and you are made to be a holy community. You and I are called to be prophets in this time and place, as the holy ones before us. Those who stood up for Christ are not limited to those we read about or have named as saints over time, but rather we are included in this list. You and I are called to stand up for Christ and God's kingdom, as a holy community, made holy through our baptism to follow those saints who came before us to seek justice, God's righteousness for the world.



We are claimed through baptism and as part of our baptismal promise of eternal life, we promise to seek justice and peace in all the world. This seems like an impossible task, but we are promised the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us each and every day. In fact, when Luther taught about the third section of the Apostles Creed, the part about the Holy Spirit, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and life everlasting, he suggested that section might be given the title "Being Made Holy." Luther

teaches that the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, makes us holy through baptism, and continues to make us holy each and every day. And I love how Luther refers to the communion of saints or the church. He calls them *"a holy little flock on earth and a community of pure saints under one head, Christ, called together by the Holy Spirit who places us in the church's lap where the Holy Spirit preaches to us and brings us to Christ."*

Isn't that beautiful.....and so it is only as a holy community, made holy in Christ, that we are able to embrace these "blessed's" and seek justice and peace for God's world.



I love the Spanish word for "Beatitudes." It is Bienaventuranza. Does anyone know what that would translate to literally? Bienaventuranza..... "Good Adventures." Looking back onto the life of that Guatemalan grandmother, Doña Gloria, wow, did she have some Good Adventures! She ventured boldly into those places where God's "blessed's" were, and was active in struggling together with so many to participate in God's kingdom on earth for the sake of Christ.

Made holy and equipped by the Holy Spirit, may we also have Good Adventures for the sake of Christ.

*"Beatitudes and
Bienaventuranzas"*

And may we be saints, like St. Gloria and Mike and Jimmy, and like all of the saints we remember today, seeking justice and peace in all the world.

AMEN.

Copyright © 2017, Jennifer A. Crist. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org