

For the people of St. Philip's  
All Saints' Sunday  
Year C  
Matthew 5: 1-12  
Maria Hoecker, preacher

Today is All Saints' Sunday. It's the major feast day in our church calendar where we remember all the saints who have gone before us. It is also a day that is specifically set aside for baptizing. Today we enter into one of those spiritual 'thin spots' where we sense the paper-thin veil that separates the Church Past from the Church Present; today's ancient liturgies and prayers grace this space and all time, this marks the time when we remember the past, live into the present and look forward to the Future.

Today we baptize Connor Fennesey. Not many of us remember our baptism day, for like Connor, many of us were baptized as infants. I was only a few months old when I was baptized. December 23 marks my 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a Baptized Christian. It took place in my mother's family's United Methodist Church in Enterprise Kansas. In the same church (with the loudly ticking pendulum clock on the wall in full view of the pulpit) where my mother and my five uncles, my grandfather and his brothers, grandmother, my great-grandmother, and great-great-grandparents lived and loved. I was baptized with my cousin, Dana, also a new baby of a few months. Both sides of his family, four generations, also lived in that same little town. I'm sure lots of us have similar stories. With such a cloud of witnesses --seen and unseen--surrounding our baptism, what better example of the Community of saints could be enacted for each of us, at our baptism. That's what it's all about.

Well, as you can see, I'm not standing at a Methodist pulpit this morning. It was only in my conversion to the Episcopal Church, that I finally got it! I "got it" the very first time I stepped into---when I became steeped in--our liturgy of the Table. The Holy Eucharist. Time stopped for me in that moment of my conversion thirty two years after my baptism. Suddenly I could see deeply into and through the thin spot. I never knew it was there.

I got it. Saints aren't idols we pray TO, as I had been told as a Methodist never to do. Suddenly I could see that saints serve to retell the sacred stories of real people whose lives were and are dazzling with God's glory. Time stops in the retelling of these stories. It is with great joy that we can join the saints who were, and are, and who will come after us.

Today's Gospel lesson is one of those stories we hear over and over, The Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. This is a familiar Gospel lesson where I'm tempted to say, "Well..yeah, of course that's the way Jesus wants us to be." We've heard these words so much, it's a challenge for me to make old words sound new, for you and for myself. So let's look at the words before us. Let's look deeply into time. Look to a point where you can see that Christ is talking to *you*. Find your place in that cloud of witnesses. Who stands beside you?

Where is this Kingdom of God? Before mentioning the future, the things yet to come, Jesus makes it quite clear that the kingdom belongs to those who are hurting. It is they who are blessed, NOT the ones who find every thing is going their way.

Let's listen to a fresher translation, in our contemporary language (Eugene Peterson, *The Message*, page 1334 )  
Go ahead and follow along with the lesson in your leaflet.

- You're blessed if you are at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.
- You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.
- You're blessed when you're content with just who you are--no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.
- You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.
- You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being care-*full*, you find yourself cared *for*.
- You're blessed when you get your inside world--your mind and heart--put right. Then you can

see God in the outside world.

- You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.
- You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's Kingdom...and know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Jesus is saying that the Kingdom of God belongs to those with absolutely no hope, —the poor in spirit; and at the same time they are also heirs alongside those whose faith is so tenacious they are willing to be persecuted for their belief in Jesus Christ. Jesus makes it clear that the kingdom of heaven belongs to us in the depths of our despair and at the core of our convictions .

Look again. Always balanced between the paradox of doubt and certainty lies the Kingdom of God. Our Jewish brothers and sisters say that so holy, and so perfect is the Torah that even the white spaces between each word are pregnant with interpretation of God's Law. Even the blank places between the words. This kingdom of God is for ALL the saints—everyone from the righteous to the destitute--the saints carry us from generation to generation. Just as Connor's parents will carry him forward today, we too carry Connor and all the saints forward.

It takes all kinds to make a Kingdom. Each Sunday is a day for saints . As we balance the act of remembering the saints surrounding us in the dazzling beauty of stained glass, we stand next to the living saints in our midst. We all come to the altar rail together, the babies and the elders- the youth and the adults. On this day we stand with all the others in the universal church who welcome a cloud of new witnesses as children of God around the world are baptized and brought into the Kingdom of God.

Our own baptism is our community's acceptance of God's great yes to each of us. As we grow and are confirmed in the church, as several of our youth will be in a few weeks, we live into our desire to become special instruments of God's work. No matter our age, whether we're baptized as infants , children, or adults, we are embraced by the Body of Christ. In that aha moment, we become living saints, and can be numbered among the countless throngs of the faithful. Most of us, who were baptized as infants don't even remember that day, the moment of our baptism. But it doesn't matter. Our loved ones remember. Our parish family remembers. Through all the generations, we remember.

Today, All Saints Sunday , is a day when we spiritually look back, into, and around to a vast cloud of witnesses. Today is a day when we look forward with divine optimism and ponder anew where God's saints' will move us. Today, we look around and see the saints among us. We see each other just as we are: the poor in spirit, those who mourn, those of us who are meek, or hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful and pure in heart, we who desire to make peace. Blessed are all of you, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are we who are heirs of God's kingdom, and who, through our works and *by sheer grace*, are striving to accomplish God's kingdom among us. Pray that this Sunday, and every Sunday will transform us, so that we may live fully into the sainthood to which we *already* belong.

Remember, it's not just about all the saints who from their labors rest, its also about the saints here and now who labor on into God's kingdom. *This* Kingdom that was, and is, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.