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Christ Lutheran Church, Ferndale, WA

All Saints Sunday

November 6, 2022

Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31

Jesus has some hard words for us today in the gospel. They are words about what it means to be blessed, and they are hard because they are upside down from what we think is true. We think that we are blessed when we are comfortable and well off, when we are well-fed and full, when we are happy and laughing, when people speak well of us. But Jesus says the opposite is true, and then to really hit it home Jesus tells us what a blessed life looks like: loving and praying for our enemies, giving to anyone who asks, even to the point of giving the shirt off our back, and doing to others as we would have them do to us.

Every time I read or hear this gospel passage I wonder if we are looking and longing for blessings in all the wrong places, because living a life of blessing shouldn't be quite so hard, should it?

The other day when I got the mail, amidst the 4,000 political advertisements stuffing our mailbox was a coupon for 45% off Christmas photo cards if you order by November 15th.

Always wanting to cash in on a good sale, this drove me to the photos on our computer of our family and our travels this year. Now, perhaps you are a way more organized person than me, but I am terrible at editing our photos and deleting the extras. I realized that there were literally 14 photos of Mike and me in exactly the same pose standing in front of the Alhambra on our trip to Spain, with very slight differences in our smiles. But I wanted to pick the photo with our best smiles. I wanted to show how blessed we were in our Christmas card photo.

What I didn't want my Christmas card photo to show was how moments before those 14 photos were taken I was wincing in pain as we walked up the hill overlooking the Alhambra due to Achilles tendonitis that I had contracted on our hike the week before in Portugal and am still dealing with even today.

I didn't want to show the reality of my pain; I just wanted to show the blessed part. I wanted to show that I had it all together, standing there in front of the Alhambra.

Now I don't have the app Be Real on my phone but I've been with some Gen Zers who do, and when their phone gives them a notification once a day that says "Time to BeReal" they have 2 minutes to snap and post 2 unfiltered and unedited photos of themselves using both the front and back cameras on their phone so their friends can see what's really happening in their lives.

Well, I think there's actually something to the idea of showing every day what life is really like. To being real instead of always trying to show how "blessed" we are.

I wonder if Jesus' words in the gospel about blessings and woes were actually his attempt to get his followers to "be real." Because life is a collection of blessings and woes. We just want to live in the blessed part—or at least the part where we think is blessed—the part where we're happy and full and comfortable all the time. Not the part where we are hurting, where we are needy, where we are dependent, where we are depressed or in grief. And we certainly don't want to show that part to other people.

But the promise Jesus is getting at in the gospel is that it's the times of grief and sorrow, the times of imperfection and hardship—the times we think of as times of woe—that the presence of God is most available to us. The times when the kingdom of God draws especially near to us. Jesus turns upside down what we think of as blessings and

woes to convince us that it's when we don't feel blessed that we are especially real and therefore actually blessed.

And where we really find life—where we really find blessing, according to Jesus—is when we love the people who are hardest to love, when we do to family, friends, and strangers the same as we would want them to do to us, when we see our “enemies” as beloved children of God just as worthy of grace and mercy as we are.

This does not mean that we put ourselves in harm's way or stay in abusive relationships—that's not what Jesus is saying here. Jesus is saying that looking beyond ourselves and sharing the totality of who we are is what makes for a blessed life.

When you are real about your struggles rather than trying to put on a face, you can understand and meet someone else in their struggles and serve as Christ's hands and heart to them. When you admit that you don't have it all together, you have more space and compassion for others who also don't have it all together. When you become more aware of the ways you seek blessing and avoid woes, you become more open to Jesus' teaching about who the kingdom of God is really for. You remember that you beloved and blessed right now, not after you achieve x, y, and z, not after you quit, not after you lose 10 pounds. You finally understand what grace is all about – you finally realize that you are blessed.

You know, none of these saints led perfect lives. But it wasn't what they did that made them saints. It was Christ who made them so, especially in times of brokenness, especially when their lives on earth came to an end and they experienced the fulfillment of the promises given to them in baptism.

You are a saint because you are real—your life is a collection of blessings and woes—and when you claim that, you are the most open to the movement of the Holy Spirit showing you that you are truly a baptized, beloved, and blessed child of God.

I'll end with a blessing written by someone whom we might not consider blessed—it's Kate Bowler who is living with stage 4 colon cancer and has written a blessing for when you don't feel #blessed in her book *Good Enough: 40ish Devotionals for a Life of Imperfection*.

(p. 125)