

November 3, 2024

All Saints Day (observed)

“Just How Things Are”

1 John 3:1-3

How do you receive these beatitudes of Jesus when you hear them read? Maybe we'll discuss that question in Sunday school this morning. These beatitudes should be rather familiar to us, but they are also quite challenging. They most certainly go against the grain of our culture, and of our selfish human nature. So how do we react to them? How do we receive them?

For me, I think I start out hearing them wrongly because I find them kind of disturbing. *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* My gut reaction is, “Gee, I don't feel all that poor in spirit. I better do something about that.” It's the same way with most of them. I don't see myself as all that merciful, pure in heart and thirsting for righteousness, so Jesus' words come across as kind of daunting—that I'd better get my act in gear as a Christian.

This attitude toward the beatitudes and then taking it that way into the Sermon on the Mount that follows may be why some in the church consider Jesus as the second great lawgiver. But that's not right. When I ponder these beatitudes more deeply it becomes pretty obvious my gut instinct is missing the truth. Jesus is not giving commands; He is simply stating how things are. And when the Holy Spirit enables a person to accept this is how things are and follow Christ, one is truly blessed; made by Christ's work a holy one, a saint. It goes from “this is how things are” to “this is how you are” because of your faith in Jesus.

This is made quite clear in our reading from St. John's first epistle. *“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.”* We can't do the beatitudes well enough to become a child of God. The Father sends His love in Christ, the Word made flesh, and we are enabled to receive and believe that Word, and we then simply are the blessed of which Christ speaks. We are blessed because we know the promise therein is true: *“Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”*

There is no if, and or but in John's words here. We believe and are baptized; thus, we have been made the God's children by God Himself. His promise in that baptism is rock-solid. Christ's resurrection is our resurrection and one day we shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever. We stand as the blessed. We stand in these beatitudes. We stand in Christ. We stand as saints forever.

But then John says this: *“And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”* There goes my gut instinct again! “Purifies himself”? That sounds an awful lot like work I have to do to get my act in gear as a Christian. And you know what? This time around my gut isn't totally wrong. But it's still not a command. Again, this is just how things are.

The truth stands that being baptized into Christ, I am a holy saint of God. What John says is the Gospel good news that being a saint, I live as a saint. I cannot live perfectly as a saint with the sinful, fallen nature still clinging to me, this is true. But I can live a life of repentance, continually turning away from my sin and toward Jesus Christ by whom I am made holy. I can continually be striving to live in His Word that compels me into the reality of those beatitudes, mourning my sin and poor in spirit over it; humbling myself and thirsting for the righteousness of Christ; being merciful because of His mercy; being at peace with others and allowing Christ to make my heart pure by His grace.

So yes, we have work to do or, as St. Paul puts it, a race to run in faith. But this race is not run under the law, out of compulsion or fear of God's wrath. We are saints! We are the children of God! We are privileged by grace to live this way now, knowing this leads to the full revelation of Jesus in our lives in His glory without end. This is just how things are for us.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, if you ever get that gut reaction that somehow living out your faith in Christ is burdensome, I highly recommend you ponder these beatitudes. At first, yes, they may seem daunting and troublesome. But the truth is, the more you contemplate what Christ is saying here, the more the Gospel promises now and forever in Christ become clear. There is no loss, only the gaining of the glory of God.

Strive to live as the saint Christ has made you. Your life is not about figuring out how to live in these beatitudes, how to purify yourself, how to be a Christian. Christ and Christ alone has done everything necessary to make you pure and holy in the eyes of God. Accept that. Believe that. Live in that grace and you being a child of God...that's just how things are.

Amen.