

The Festival of All Saints | St. Matthew 5:1-12
November 1, 2015 | Parkland Evangelical Lutheran Church

In Nomine Iesu

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Father in heaven, You have promised us that *“through many tribulations we must enter [Your] kingdom”* (Ac. 14:22). Strengthen and keep us in the faith, so that we do not grow impatient or weary in times of trouble. Help us to *“set [our] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”* Remind us that we were joined to Jesus’ holy body in the waters of Baptism, and are kept in His body through Word and Sacrament. We thank You for counting us as saints through faith in Him, so that *“when Christ who is [our] life appears, then [we] also will appear with Him in glory”* (Col. 3:2,4). In Jesus’ holy name we pray. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for this morning is taken from the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus’ name:

Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when others 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 so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, the Founder and Perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2), dear fellow redeemed:

Once a birthday or holiday gets on a child’s radar, it is very difficult for them to patiently wait for the day to come. “Is it tomorrow?” – “No, it won’t be for another two months.” – “How long is that?” – “About 60 days.” Then a couple days pass, “Now is it tomorrow?” Those days seem to stretch on and on, but even the impatient child survives the ordeal and welcomes the big day.

But it is not just children who have trouble waiting for good things. It is true for all people. We burn our mouths on hot food again and again. We reinjure what we didn’t give enough time to heal. Students check out a week before vacation starts. Couples who are dating act like husband and wife even though they are not married. People get reckless with investments because they

don't want to hold off that extra five years. No matter how many times we are reminded, "Good things come to those who wait," it doesn't get any easier.

We struggle in the same way with the good things promised by God. In the Gospel lesson for today from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, He says to us His disciples that we shall be comforted, that we shall inherit the earth, that we shall see God. But when? When will these things be true? Well, they already are... and they will be. **The Promises of Jesus Are Already and Not Yet.**

I

The scene depicted in Revelation 7 (Epistle lesson) gives us a glimpse of what is in store for us in heaven. St. John describes *"a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"* This great multitude now includes Jennifer, Ron, and Mary, the saints among us who died within the last year. In due time, this great multitude in heaven will also include us. But not yet. One of our hymns puts it like this:

And now we fight the battle, / But then shall wear the crown
Of full and everlasting / And passionless renown;
And now we watch and struggle, / And now we live in hope,
And Zion in her anguish / With Babylon must cope. (#534, v. 4)

Now we struggle. We struggle because we are not yet free of the assaults of the devil, not yet free of this corrupting world, not yet free of our sinful nature. But at the same time that we struggle, we also live in hope. We live in hope because God has made certain promises to us, promises of what He *has done* and *will do* for us.

You would agree that it is a very different thing to promise that you will kill the nasty spider in the other room, than to actually follow through on the promise. Only the follow through gives comfort to the arachnophobiac. God not only promised to send a Savior from sin, He followed through. The follow through waited for thousands of years, but it happened. *"[W]hen the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons"* (Galatians 4:4-5). When the time in human history was just right, God's Son descended from His throne, taking on flesh in Mary's womb. He humbled Himself, not making full use of His divine powers, and He suffered all the way to the cross and a horrible, hellish death.

Jesus did this because God made a promise. God promised to redeem all sinners from their sins. He promised to swallow up death forever. He promised to crush the haughty head of Satan. Jesus' resurrection from the dead on the Third Day proved that God keeps His promises. The empty tomb was the declaration to the whole world that everything was accomplished exactly as God said it would be.

II

But there is something about this that doesn't seem quite right. How is it that the same Jesus who utterly defeated the powers of sin, death, and devil, would also say, *"Blessed are you when*

others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely”? It seems that keeping us from troubles like this would be easy for the all-powerful Savior.

There are several possible explanations for this seeming contradiction between the accounts of Scripture and the experience of our lives. Some say that the mighty works of God described in the Bible are not true. They say that God did not create the heavens and the earth, and that Jesus did not die and rise again. If that is the case, then we could also be fairly confident that there is no god that will be helping us in this life. Others suggest that God did what He promised in sending a Savior, but what happens from that point on is up to us. God has done His work, now it’s time for us to roll up our sleeves and do ours. Others wonder if God used to care about the human race, but His patience has worn thin, and He has all but given up on us.

There is still another explanation. This is that everything recorded in the Bible is true, not just about what Jesus accomplished, but also what God said His people would face in this sinful world. Then it would be obvious that the main problem is not that God is weak, unfaithful, or impatient, but that we are. As much as we want to pin the problems of our lives on God, the reality is that the problems ultimately come from us. This is not to say that every bad thing we experience in this life comes because of our own sin. But it is true that every bad thing is a result of sin in the world. Without sin, there would be no sorrow, no hunger and thirst, no lack of mercy, no crooked hearts, no conflict, no hatred. God did not initiate these troubles, man did. “[S]in came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

In our sin, we want to hold God to promises that He never made. When we are hurting, we ask God why He doesn’t take away our pain. But God never promised us a life of ease and perpetual good feelings. When we fall into sin, we wonder why God didn’t stop us. But God isn’t the one who led us into temptation. When we are persecuted for following God’s Word, we ask God why He doesn’t stop the wicked efforts of those who hate Him. But God never promised that it would be smooth-sailing for His followers in this world.

III

What God has promised is that *“if we are faithless, He remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself”* (2Tim. 2:13). For how ready we are to doubt God’s love for us, how ready we are to give in to temptation, how ready we are to suggest what it is that God should be doing, our merciful Lord is just as ready to forgive us. He is just as ready to save us and strengthen us and encourage us. He helps us to understand that while all of His good gifts are ours even now, we will not fully appreciate and enjoy them until we are in heaven. Jesus does not misspeak when He says that we are “blessed.” We are blessed because the kingdom of heaven is ours. We are part of Christ’s holy body by faith, which means we reign with Him in His kingdom right now. We do not yet experience this kingdom in all its glory, but that makes us no less a part of the kingdom already.

In the same way, we are comforted in our sorrow now by the message of forgiveness and life through Jesus, and we will enjoy eternal rest in the mansions above. We are filled with Jesus’ righteousness now by faith, and we will enjoy this perfection uninhibited in heaven. We “see” God now but with the eyes of faith, and we will see Him with our own eyes forevermore. We have peace with God now through our Lord Jesus Christ, and we will enjoy an eternity of no conflict, squabbles, or disagreements with all the saints above.

The Promises of Jesus Are Already and Not Yet. God has not kept any good gift from us, but our sin keeps us from fully realizing and enjoying them. Jesus promises that the total enjoyment of these gifts is well worth the short wait of this life. Remember that the saints of old waited for thousands of years for the promise of salvation to be fulfilled. We have likely only a few decades to wait until we join the *“great multitude [in heaven] that no one could number, from every nation.”* And it will not be long until Jesus returns in glory to bring us to heaven with bodies incorruptible and imperishable.

Jesus has done all the work to win our life and salvation, and He continues to visit us through the means of grace to strengthen and keep us as we endure the trials of this earthly life. Our Lord’s mercies are far beyond what we deserve, but as He has promised so He does – not because we have earned it, not because God owes us anything, but because He loves us. Therefore we sing His praises now, and by His grace we will sing them for eternity with all the saints in heaven. *Amen.*

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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