

Today I'm proclaiming God's word from a traditional Gospel reading for All Saints, the Beatitudes, from Matthew 5:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

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

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

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

'Blessed are you 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.

Today I'll be focusing on *three* of the beatitudes, or blessings

That Jesus proclaims:

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father, by your word fill us with your Holy Spirit, so that we may live as salt and light in the world. In Jesus' name.

Before I get into the text,

I just want to say a few words about All Saints' Day.

You know that as a church it's a normal thing for us

Not only to celebrate the life and work of Jesus Christ,

But also to remember with thanksgiving the life and work

Of those brothers and sisters in the faith

Who now rest from their labours,

And who in their life of faith gave encouraging examples to us

Of the power of God's Spirit-filled word

To grow us in the life of Christian love.

In the Augsburg Confession,

That great statement of faith that is peculiar to the Lutheran Church,

We say, *Our churches teach that the history of the saints may be set before us so that we may follow their faith and good works, according to our calling. Augsburg Confession, Article XXI*

So it's not uncommon for Lutheran churches to be named after Saints,

Or to have special day set aside to remember with thanksgiving to God

The encouraging examples of those who have gone before us.

In the Augsburg Confession they mention King David

As an encouraging example to Christian political leaders.

But there are many other examples from the Bible

And from church history that the church recognises

As especially worthy of remembrance.

Today I want to encourage you to think at a more local level.

If you're anything like me you have people in your life,

People who may not have been perfect,

Who were themselves well aware of their faults, but who nevertheless Were encouraging examples to you of faithful living.

Maybe they were family members, or friends, or co-workers,

Or members of this or other Christian congregations.
Think about these people: what is it about them that encouraged you?
What are you especially thankful to God for about them?
This is a good day to think about these questions.
And to give thanks to God for these people.

Today we're looking at three aspects of holy living,
Of encouraging examples of what faithful life looks like
Starting with Jesus' proclamation

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Jesus here is saying that the *merciful* are blessed by God,
And that they will receive mercy *from God*.
But what does it mean to be merciful?

Well, let's listen to some examples from Matthew's Gospel
Where mercy is mentioned.
I'll read them out one after the other.
Listen in, and see what picture emerges for you:

Matthew 9.27: **As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, 'Have mercy on us, Son of David!'**

Matthew 15.22: **Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, 'Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.'**

Matthew 17.15: **[The man] said, 'Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water.'**

Matthew 20.30: **There were two blind men sitting by the roadside. When they heard that Jesus was passing by, they shouted, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!'**

What's common in all these examples?
The people calling out have real needs
They or people close to them need help.
When they are asking Jesus for mercy,
They are not asking for forgiveness, they are asking for *help*.
For *sight*, for *deliverance from evil*, for *healing from sickness*.
We know that in these examples, Jesus is merciful,
He listens to them, he responds to their faith-filled cries,
And he helps them in their need according to who he is
As the Son of God,
And according to the calling he has to go to the Cross.

Maybe you've been in need in your life,
For friendship, or encouragement,
Even the simple encouragement that can come
From being invited into someone's home for dinner.
Maybe you've needed help in sickness,
Or a lift to church, or even help in looking after the kids,
And a brother or sister in Christ has been there for you.
They have shown their faith in Christ
In the *help* that they have given you,
By the *mercy* that they have shown.
This practical help is saintly action, it has God's approval.
Today is a day especially to give thanks to God for these people.

What's more,
Jesus assures us that those who have helped us,
Who have shown their faith in Christ in their Godly action,
Jesus assures us that those who have been *merciful* to us,
Will also find mercy from God.

OK. Let's go to the next beatitude, the next blessing:

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

Now in commenting on this beatitude, Luther says:

Be a reconciler and a mediator between your neighbours. Carry the best to both sides; but keep quiet about the bad, which the devil has inspired, or explain it the best way you can. But if you must speak about an evil deed, do as Christ said: go straight to the party and admonish (Matthew 18:15). Martin Luther

Think about people who have been good examples
Of Christian living to you: How have they talked about other people?
How have they dealt with conflict?
Luther says that peacemaking is shown when people
Don't amplify the sins of others in their speech,
But rather promote good things about them,
Especially in cases of conflict.
He also says that peacemaking is seen
When people go directly to those with whom they are in conflict
And speak the truth in love,
Trying not to drag their brother or sister down,
But to win them back to harmonious living
In the body of Christ.

Maybe there have been Christians
With whom you have been in conflict,
Who may not have been perfect in the Christian life,
But who have shown their faith in Christ by coming directly to you,
And talking with you in a spirit of love,
Rather than talking about you behind your back.
Today is a day to give thanks to God for these people:
They have shown their faith in Christ,
By dealing with others in the same Spirit of reconciliation,
That they have received in Christ.

What's more, Jesus assures us,
That those who have covered the shame of others,
Who have spoken words that build others up,
Who have come to us in conflict to speak the truth in love,
Jesus assures us that those who are peacemakers,
Will be called children of God.
That God will call them his sons, his daughters.

OK, Let's listen to the last beatitude the last blessing for today:

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.'

Blessed are those who want God's justice to be seen in the world,
In the church, *and in their own lives*.
Blessed are those for whom God's justice is not a pious addition
To the apparently more important business of life
Of making money, or seeking pleasure, or reputation,

But whose desire for God's good and righteous will
Is like the desire of food is to the hungry,
And like the desire of water is to the thirsty.

Think about the people who have been good examples
Of Christian living to you: How have these people reacted to injustice
In the world, in the workplace, or in the church?
How have they reacted to the sin, the injustice, *in their own lives*?

Maybe there have been Christians who have talked about
Their own sin, their own need for forgiveness from God
That has at first seemed over the top to you.
But then you've seen how their hunger and thirst
For a justice, a righteousness,
That comes not from human striving or power,
But from God's grace in Christ Jesus,
Leads them to work in humility for what is just and right
In the places where God has placed them:
In the family, in the congregation, in the workplace,
In the political realm, as God has given them callings.

Today is a day to give thanks to God for these people:
They have shown their faith in Christ,
By having a hunger and thirst for justice
That has at its heart a divine humility,
A fundamental understanding that God brings about his justice
Primarily in showing his grace, his mercy,
And his forgiveness of injustice in the life, death, and resurrection
Of Jesus, the very one who speaks to us the word of God.

What's more Jesus assures us,
That those who have dealt with the reality of injustice
In a spirit of humility, and a knowledge of the power of the Gospel
To bring God's justice into this fallen world,
Jesus assures us that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
Will be filled – that God will fill them.

Today is All Saints' Day
A day when we remember with thanksgiving to God
The Christian brothers and sisters who have been good examples
To us of the life of faith in Christ
And who have shown this life of faith in their deeds of love.
Let us not glorify them,
But with them
Glorify our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
He is the unique Holy One of God,
It is in him alone that we have the gift of God's mercy,
Of God's forgiveness,
Or reconciliation with God.

And so with angels and archangels,
And with saints innumerable in the glorious company of heaven,
Let us glorify the human being Jesus Christ,
Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit
Lives and reigns as one God, now and forever. Amen.