Matthew 5:1-12 – All Saints' Day – Theirs Is the Kingdom of Heaven – November 1, 2026
+In Nomine Iesu+

Our Gospel reading for All Saints' Sunday takes us to the Sermon on the Mount. And Jesus begins with the Beatitudes. On All Saints' Sunday, we often talk about heaven, the intermediate state, and what happens when we die. We celebrate the intersection—in the divine service—between the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. We talk about life and eternal life. And I will touch on such things today. But my main purpose today is to help us read Jesus' Sermon well.

Now, my purpose is every so slightly selfish. I think if we learn to hear this sermon—if we read this sermon rightly—it will help us so much with every other sermon that we hear—including mine. And this all comes back to our expectations. It all comes back to whom the sermon is about.

Our favorite sermons might be the ones that are mostly clearly about us. They tell us something about our lives. They are applicable to our real lives. And clearly, every sermon should have something to say to us. This isn't entirely misguided. But I want you to think about sermons in another way. And in the end, I hope that you will have a renewed appreciation for what I am trying to do.

Jesus begins this Sermon on the Mount with His blessing upon His Disciples. Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the mountain. And the Disciples came to Him. The audience for this Sermon is His Disciples. It is important to notice, the Beatitudes are not generic blessings on nice people.

The crowds had been following Jesus for a while. They find Him interesting. They seek to get something out of Him as He goes around healing every dread disease. They are starting to hear what Jesus is saying. But hearing is not the same as listening. Although it is a place to start.

But the Disciples are different. They used to be part of the crowd. They even saw themselves as part of the crowd. They were just like all the others—zealots, fishermen, tax collectors. But then Jesus called them. And that call changed everything. And so they left everything and followed Jesus.

And since then, they have belonged to Jesus completely. They find their identity in Him. They live in light of what He says. They follow Him wherever He leads. Something has happened to the Disciples that has not yet happened with the crowds.

And this is evident to the crowds. And as time goes by, we will find that it is even unsettling and offensive to them. There will be enmity between the Disciples and the crowds at the end. The crowd is always wrong. And in this way, the cross comes into view.

Even so, Matthew often tells us Jesus had compassion for the crowds. He felt sorrow over their condition. He longed to gather them to Himself. We should think the same. But here, before He delivered the Sermon, we are told He simply *saw* the crowds.

The physical distance expresses the theological distance. This is always the case. But here it puts the Disciples at odds with the crowd. That's one danger—really a very minor one in the scheme of things.

But there is a greater danger. And it is a little unexpected. The Disciples cannot avoid being directly addressed by Jesus. This may not sound dangerous. But let me suggest it is. God's Word is powerful and living and active. It messes with us.

In Exodus, God calls Moses to ascend Mt. Sinai to receive the Law. Mt. Sinai was wrapped in smoke. The whole mountain quaked with the presence of God and the thunder of His voice. God even instructs that no one else, besides Aaron, was allowed to join Moses on the mountain. Most were too terrified to go anyway.

Like that day, this is an important moment for the Disciples. This Sermon changes the whole direction of their lives. But they are courageous. They actually had the mettle to be addressed by Jesus—to receive His teaching—to hear and listen.

Jesus is the new and better Moses—true enough. But Jesus is also the eternal voice of God. Mountains shake at His presence. Mountains were formed at His Word. But here, it is not the mountain. It is the minds and lives and futures of the Disciples that need some shaking up.

This is the setting for the Sermon on the Mount. And this Sermon is also unintelligible if we isolate it from the rest of Matthew's Gospel. It very quickly becomes just another unreasonable law—another set of unreachable ethics—if what is taught is disconnected from the Teacher.

If we isolate the Sermon from Jesus—who is the righteousness that He demands of His Disciples— we end up with the wrong questions. Do we really have to follow Jesus in all of this? Does Jesus really expect us to live without lust? What do we do with our hatred if we have to love our enemies?

And once we ask such questions, we then develop strategies to help us avoid thinking that it does apply to our lives. For example, some suggest that the whole Sermon is only about our thoughts, but it is not relevant for public life. But you won't find a place in Matthew's Gospel to make such a distinction.

Others suggest that we read the Sermon on the Mount simply to make us feel guilty. The Sermon merely serves to drive us to recognize our need for forgiveness. And from such a perspective, the Sermon's hard sayings are, at best, just ideals Christians should attempt and admire. And whether we live by these standards or not, does not reveal the character of our faith in God.

I want us to read the Sermon on the Mount a different way. Which, of course, means I want us to read it—and even re-read it.

But centrally, what cannot be forgotten, is the One who preaches the Sermon. He is the Son of God. He is the Messiah, the Christ. He unites heaven and earth. He prepares us for eternity. And He is making all things new. The Sermon is the reality of the new age breaking into the present time. We cannot distinguish the Sermon from the One who delivers it.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book The Cost of Discipleship, says this, "The Sermon on the Mount is the word of the one who did not relate to reality as a foreigner, a reformer, a fanatic, or the founder of a religion, but as the one who bore and experienced the nature of reality in his own body, who spoke out of the depth of reality as no other human being on earth ever before. The Sermon on the Mount is to be understood and interpreted as the word of God who became human. Action in accord with Christ does not originate in some ethical principle, but in the very person of Jesus Christ."

So this sermon is not heroic ethics—not exactly. It is not about doing more and trying harder. It is the constitution of a people who belong to the Kingdom of Heaven—and it's King. Of course, you cannot live the demands of this Sermon on your own. But

that is the point. You were never meant to. The demands of the Sermon are designed to make us depend on Jesus Christ. All the while, it points us forward to the hope of the coming kingdom.

Our only hope of living this Sermon is to acknowledge that we do not retaliate—we do not hate, curse, lust, divorce, swear, brag, preen, worry, or backbite—***because*** of Jesus—and because that is not who Jesus is. Our eternal destinies—and even our lives this afternoon—are all caught up in His character and in His life.

When we fail in these areas, we don't shrug our shoulders and make our excuses. Remember, grace is a costly thing. Instead, we remember that the One preaching this Sermon is larger than the sum of our individual failures. He has conquered all these things in His cross and resurrection and ascension. And now Jesus points us in an eternal direction that will carry us away from our sins—and that will carry us into eternity.

So this is not a list of entrance requirements for the kingdom of heaven. Instead, it is a description of the life of a people gathered by and around Jesus. To be blessed is to be called—to be chosen—to be regenerated. We are brought from death to life. We are brought out of the crowds—and into the ranks of the Disciples—following Jesus.

And that is why the Beatitudes are the interpretive key to the whole Sermon—precisely because they are not recommendations. They are descriptions of Christ, first and foremost. They point to the cross, the resurrection, and Jesus' purposes for His Disciples. And then they call Disciples to find their inner—and even public—disposition in Christ.

And so, Jesus says things like, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Again, notice the eternal implications for us on All Saints' Day. So many of the promises from the Beatitudes point us towards eternal life.

And so we ask, what does it mean to be meek? Who is actually meek? When we hear this word, we think it means something like timid or emotionally soft. We think of someone afraid to say or do anything. But that is not what meek means here.

It does mean something like humility. But that is another word I fear we misunderstand. Remember, we need to think of these traits as those possessed by Jesus. They are traits of His kingdom. And as people who are in Christ, He produces these traits in us. They mark us as those set aside by Christ—out of the crowds—to be His Disciples.

Meekness is not the absence of power, confidence, or competence. Remember that Jesus is dangerous. His Word is dangerous. Both the Pharisees and the crowds will recognize this eventually.

But meekness means He doesn't make use of His divine attributes selfishly. Jesus comes into the world—born into poverty—born in controversy. He comes in an ordinary human body. He enters Jerusalem as King, yet riding on a donkey. He is rejected by the crowds. He dies on a cross. All on purpose. All to achieve God's purposes in the world.

So meekness is something more like having great power—being dangerous. But then having the kind of self-control and self-discipline—wisdom—not to use that power in selfish ways.

Paul says it best in Philippians 2, "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

“Have this mind among yourselves,” Paul says. And he calls us to meekness. And it is a blessing. And it is all about being caught up in the life of Christ.

So hear these Beatitudes as disciples of Jesus Christ. Hear them as the revelation of Jesus Christ. Hear them as the Gospel—as blessings—as the Word of Christ—as something we see in Christ—and something Christ works in us as individuals within the community of His people—the Church.

Remember that Jesus preaches this Sermon. And that makes all the difference. And listening to this Sermon from Jesus will help us listen to all the other sermons we hear around here. The sermon is supposed to be about Jesus.

Now, these blessings may mean some difficulty. A meek and selfless life might bring some opposition from the crowd—from the world. And these blessings make demands of us—self-control and self-discipline.

But they also promise eternal reward. They signal the present kingdom of God in Jesus Christ. And they signal the eternal kingdom. With all of this in mind—hear them—listen to them. Find Christ in them. And hear this sermon—or at least the introduction—one more time.

“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.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+