

Sermon for All Saints 2025
Blessings and Woes

Blessed are you . . .

Woe to you . . .

What do you make of Jesus' talk of blessings and woes?

It's fairly easy, I think, to hear the blessings and woes
as rewards and punishments
or as a categorization of saints and sinners
and yet I also think that would be a mistake and a misunderstanding
of Jesus' sermon, of the gospel he is preaching.
There is nothing inherently virtuous or holy
about poverty, hunger or grief.
Lord knows the world doesn't need more pain and misery.
Neither is there anything inherently sinful or wrong
about being rich, full, or laughing.

Jesus isn't talking about what or how much we have or don't have.
It's not about a bottom-line calculation of our bank account,
or the number of meals or calories we consume each day,
or whether we spend more time crying than laughing.
Jesus is talking about a quality of life
not a quantity of stuff.
He is talking about how we are in the world,
not what we have.
He is concerned for our way of being.

Often when we are poor, hungry, weeping—whether materially,
emotionally, or spiritually—we sometimes find that we are open and
receptive because we are looking for something new,
longing for a different way of being in the world.
We don't want to keep life the same old way so we are looking and
working for change.

Often when we are rich, full and laughing—
materially, emotionally or spiritually—
we tend to want more of the same.

We don't want change.

We are not looking for anything new or different because, well,
we're doing just fine.

We work to defend and keep the status quo.

So what if blessings and woes are descriptive of two different ways
of being in the world?

One way is when our hearts, hopes, and aspirations are turned toward
the coming of something new, something different.

We are open to the future, to one another, to the possibility of what
seems impossible.

And where there is a future, there is life and more life.

The other way of being in the world is when we are closed to the future,
to others, to something new or different.

We are self-enclosed and believe ourselves to be self-sufficient.

We are bound to the world as it is, maybe we are even stuck.

What if we were to think of blessings and woes
as guides to making the kingdom present?

Do you remember the hot and cold game?

Maybe you played it as a kid or maybe you've played it with your
children or grandchildren.

Someone picks an object in the room
but doesn't identify it to the other players.

The other players move about searching for the object and are told,
"You're warm. Yes, you're getting warmer.

Oh, now you're cold. You're ice cold."

It's a way of telling the players
whether they are close to or far from the chosen object.

What if blessings and woes are Jesus saying we are either warm or cold
toward the kingdom, getting close to or moving away from it?

Because, you see, the kingdom of God is not a what, it's a how.
It is not a place or a time or thing, but a way of being in this world.
You and I give existence to God's kingdom
by the how of our being in the world.
The kingdom is God's dream, hope, desire and longing for the world.
It is God's call to us.
And it's up to us to respond and make it present.
And sometimes we do.

From time to time the kingdom actually happens
through our way of being in the world.
That's what we remember and celebrate today on the feast of All Saints.
We remember our calling to give existence to the kingdom.
Sometimes we're warm and sometimes we're cold.
We remember and give thanks for those people whose how of life
gave existence to God's kingdom and life in this world
in their time and place.
They are witnesses that we, too, can give existence to the kingdom,
to God's how of being, in our life, time, place and circumstances.
They are examples how the light of Christ shines from age to age,
and guides our footsteps as the hymn says "mid mists and rocks
and quick-sands" . . . making it possible for us to be as Christ to others.
That's the manifestation of the kingdom.

Some of these saints are ones who have a place on the calendar—
people like Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Mary, Augustine, Francis,
Bonhoeffer, and so many more.
Others are local and particular to us, known only to us.
They may not have a place on the church's calendar
but they have a place in our hearts.
I think of my parents, grandparents and brother but also
of Chris and Herb and David and so many others.
My list could go on and on.
What about you? Who is on your list of saints?

Some have died. Others still live.
But all stand with and are companions with us
as teachers, examples, and guides.
They have cared for and nurtured us, loved and guided us,
taught and mentored and served with and for us.
They showed us a *how* of being that was
holy (though they may never have thought so)
but also earthy and very human,
lives full of all the joys and sorrows, blessings and woes.
They are part of the great cloud of witnesses who invite us to take our
place in the line of saints past, present and future.

Christ's kingdom comes locally, temporarily, intermittently,
episodically in our particular circumstances
through our *how* of being in the world.
It mostly happens on the margins of power, at the edges—
and rarely at the center—much to the surprise of those who are in power.
The kingdom is the reversal of all reversals.
The kingdom comes, is actually here, is real and incarnate
whenever we love our enemies,
do good to those who hate us,
pray for those who abuse us,
turn the other cheek,
welcome the stranger,
feed the hungry,
clothe the naked,
forgive our offender,
give to the beggar.
(You can see why the kingdom tends to elude those in power?)
Every time we do to others as we would have them do to us,
we incarnate the presence of Christ—which is the kingdom.

So where and in what ways do you see that happening in your life today,
in the world today?
Are you, are we, getting warmer or colder?

You and I have the great call to give existence to God's kingdom
“on earth as it is in heaven.”

Have you ever considered how much God wants to us you,
all of us, to bring the kingdom to life here and now?

Have you ever thought of yourself as a saint?

As one whose baptism ordains you to a live a life that makes a
difference to others and to the world?

What if we were to step into our own sainthood—
baptism, our inheritance in Christ—

in our particular time and place,
in the circumstances of our lives,
in our daily relationships?

What might that look like in your life today?

What would it take?

We just might change, benefit or heal the life of another
and a piece of the world.

God grant us grace to follow his saints in lives of faith and commitment.