

The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two (BCP p. 355)
Feast of All Saints' Sunday: November 1, 2020

The Sermon: Rev. Carol Ruthven

“Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord; let us exalt his Name together.” Psalm 34:3

Today we joyfully celebrate All Saints' Day which is one of the seven principal feasts of our Church.ⁱ The white color of our vestments and altar linens symbolize this festival of joy. We celebrate the fact that the martyrs and saints of the church, both known and unknown, have gone before us into a closer presence with God. We also continually grow into our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The opening words of the Collect beautifully express this: “Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord.”ⁱⁱ We are received into the communion of saints through our baptism as Christians. This is why All Saints' Day is one of four holy days recommended for baptismⁱⁱⁱ. This evening we will celebrate with great joy the baptism of Deanna and Shane Harvey's baby daughter Leilani and welcome her as a new member of the Church.

This morning, I want you to imagine for a moment that you are standing on a grassy hill in Galilee with the disciples and a huge crowd of people eagerly listening to Jesus speaking about the kingdom of heaven. Folks of all ages and walks of life have come from far and wide to be near Jesus. They have heard that he has healed people. They have heard that he has restored sight to the blind, enabled the disabled to walk, removed the spasms that wretched havoc on a child's body, and restored a woman on her deathbed. It seems that he had healed all sorts of diseases and afflictions. As word of his healing has spread, thousands were following Jesus wherever he went.^{iv}

The crowds of people were clinging to hope that Jesus would have compassion for them, bring healing, and make them well. So many of them were impoverished by the crushing taxes imposed by the Roman officials. They hated the corruption of elected officials. They knew that the occupying Roman forces could care less about their well-being. These impoverished hard-working Palestinian villagers were bullied and

harassed at the slightest signs of any resistance to Roman authority. They clung to the hope that Jesus understood that their lives mattered.^v

Jesus did not disappoint them. In his great compassion for them and their well-being, he assured them that the poor in spirit would inherit the kingdom of heaven. He said that those who mourn would be comforted. He assured them that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness would be filled. He knew that masses of people were suffering and in pain. He knew that they were mourning everything that they had lost. He knew that they were yearning for righteousness. Despite all the challenges that they faced, they would not give up. They trusted Jesus because he had compassion for them and gave them hope.^{vi}

Jesus wanted his disciples to understand the breadth and depth of the missionary and ministry opportunities that lay ahead of them. They simply needed to care for all of these people, who Jesus knew were blessed in God's eyes. Jesus told the crowds of people that those who are meek will inherit the earth. In other words, those who are gentle and merciful towards all people are the ones who will inherit God's kingdom.

Jesus said that those who are pure in heart will see God. I love the words of Psalm 51:10: "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." Living with a right spirit is all about the work of our hearts. If our hearts are pure, we see the poor and oppressed and we have compassion for them. We are willing to speak out and stand in solidarity with them.

Jesus, the Prince of Peace, assured the crowds of people that those who worked for peace would be blessed and called children of God. As baptized Christians we are also committed to work for justice and peace among all people.

These teachings of Jesus are known as the beatitudes. They have been cherished by Christians for centuries. They are not just blessings; they are also a call for all of us to be the church of Jesus Christ. Like our ancient ancestors on those hills of Galilee, we are living during a time in which there is great pain and suffering. More than 200,000 people are mourning the loss of loved family members and friends, who have died of the coronavirus. Millions of people across America are mourning the loss of their jobs, homes, and any sense of normalcy as our daily routines have been disrupted. We

grieve not being able to gather in person to worship and to gather with family and friends. We long for peace in our nation and healing of the deep, painful divisions that are tearing the social fabric of our nation.

Like our ancient ancestors who flocked to Jesus, we are comforted by Jesus' promise that we are not alone. Like Jesus' disciples, we are called by Jesus to minister to those who are poor, hungry, homeless, and suffering and to assure them that they are not alone. We can bring hope to people by telling them that God loves them and that we love them. We can bring light into the darkened corners of our world by proclaiming Jesus' promise, "I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

We are doing all of this by donating lunches, masks and hand sanitizer to homeless folks in downtown Richmond. We are doing this by making plans to provide safe and warm places for homeless persons to stay overnight and a meal to eat during the coming cold months of winter. We are doing this when we donate food for the food pantries in churches in Richmond. We are doing this when we share with everyone we meet the Good News of Jesus Christ and the life-giving and transformative power of God's love.

Let us pray.

"Gracious God, fount of every blessing: we praise you for the magnificent promise we have in Jesus Christ. We rejoice in his assurance that those who mourn will be comforted and those who yearn for righteousness will be satisfied. Pour your blessing upon us, that in all that we do, we may tell the good news of your healing and justice. In the name of the One who is mercy unbounded and love incarnate: Jesus Christ, to whom all honor, glory, and praise, now and forever. Amen." ^{vii}

ⁱ BCP p. 15.

ⁱⁱ BCP p. 245.

ⁱⁱⁱ BCP p. 312.

^{iv} <https://day1.org/weekly-broadcast/5f8ef8196615fb1db8000052/carolyn-j-sharp-witnesses-to-the-kingdom>.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Ibid.