

All Saints' Sunday  
Our Future Hope and Our Present Hope  
Luke 6:20-31  
11-03-13

When I was serving as a pastor in Iowa we had a visitor one Sunday, who I still remember, because a few days after that Sunday visit, I received a letter in the mail. I opened it and read with disappointment that she was not planning to come back and visit our church.

She had been warmly welcomed.

She found the worship service and the sermon meaningful.

But in the letter she shared with me that she was in the middle of time of deep sorrow, and grief. And she looked around that Sunday she imagined she was the only one, who was suffering.

Of course, how could she have known?

But she concluded that everyone else was perfectly fine.

They looked happy. And she felt out of place, and alone.

And the worst part of this story is that she didn't come back.

And she missed out on the opportunity to be embraced by others in that church who would have gladly come along beside her, and comforted her with the hope they had received themselves, during their own times of grief.

Have you ever felt weary of this world?

Have you ever carried a burden so heavy that you began to long for heaven?

During times like that we can be tempted to despair.

Like the woman who wrote me that letter we can imagine that no one else can understand.

We might even want to be free from the burdens of this world, longing for heaven and lose sight of Jesus' presence with us here and now.

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As we celebrate this All Saints' Sunday

we celebrate both a future hope, the hope of eternal life, in Heaven,  
and a present hope, the hope of eternal life that begins in Holy Baptism,  
when Christ makes us his own  
and we begin to live our lives in Him.

Jesus said, "I have come that you may have life, and life abundantly"

And in today's Gospel, Jesus pronounces his blessing on those who are suffering.

The crowds that gathered around him were hungry for that blessing.

They were among the poorest of the poor.

The Greek word in Luke is “begging poor.”  
They were poor, and hungry, and crying out for healing.

And what did they see in Jesus?  
They saw hope, and wholeness, and life.  
The kind of life, they couldn’t find anywhere else.

Dallas Willard put it this way,  
Jesus “brings us the life we hunger for.  
In sharing our weakness Jesus gives us strength  
and imparts through His companionship, a life that has the quality of eternity.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, our hope is not based on the circumstances of our lives.  
The circumstances of our lives, do not define us.

In this world we may suffer loss,  
the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job, or a business, or something we treasure

But Jesus calls out to us,  
just as he did to the crowds in today’s Gospel,  
and announces that He has entered into deepest hurts of this world,  
and transformed them, through His presence.

From a human point of view we may feel far from blessed,  
But through God’s power and presence,  
Jesus can transform even the burdens of this world and remind us where our true hope is  
found.

Likewise, those who experience the comforts of this world, but do not know Jesus,  
are warned, they they will not find life or hope in those comforts.

Jesus warns those who are rich and self-satisfied, to not take comfort in their circumstances.  
    Apart from Jesus, it means nothing.  
    Apart from Jesus, it is not even a blessing.  
    Apart from Jesus, the things we own, have a way of owning us.

In Confirmation class last Sunday,  
we were studying the 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment. “You shall have no other gods, before me.”  
And our 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders took two white boards,  
and made a list of all the things that tempt us to break that commandment.

<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* p. 13

all the things that we sometimes allow to take the place of God.  
And the list they came up with included: money, work, being popular, other activities on Sundays. We can even allow people to take the place of God.

On this All Saints' Sunday we are encouraged to follow another way.

On our own we have difficulty being faithful and trusting in God above all things,  
but we are not all on our own.

Listen to these words from Hebrews, chapter 12,  
"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,  
and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,  
looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith,  
who for the sake of the joy that was set before him,  
endured the cross, disregarding the shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God."<sup>2</sup>

This great cloud of witnesses, all the saints who have gone before us,  
have planted the seeds of faith, and laid the foundation.

Think about who some of those witnesses have been in your own life.

- Faithful parents, or grandparents.
- A pastor, Sunday School teacher, or youth leader
- A friend who invited you to church, and prays for you

Each of these people have set faithful examples for us to follow.  
And their witness strengthens us as we confront the joys and sorrows of this life.  
God uses all these people, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and baptismal sponsors,  
to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus.  
to remind us of who we are in Christ.

That we are not defined by our circumstances, but by Jesus who blesses us,  
and calls us to join that great cloud of witnesses.

Together with all of God's faithful people  
we have been given a mission:

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,  
baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son,  
and of the Holy Spirit,  
and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.  
And surely, I will be with you always, to the very end of the age."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Hebrews 12:1-2

Even in the face of hardship or suffering,  
Jesus has promised to be with us always.  
May our whole lives be lived in response to that promise. Amen.