



## Sermon for the Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost, October 2020

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Revelation 7:9-17](#) [Psalm 34:1-10, 22](#) [1 John 3:1-3](#) [Matthew 5:1-12](#)

Almighty God, you have knit together your elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of your Son Christ our Lord: Give us grace so to follow your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those ineffable joys that you have prepared for those who truly love you; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

Today is the Feast of All Saints. Today, we open our eyes to see, or to try and glimpse, the amazing company of people in God's Kingdom, spanning all history and connecting across all nations of the world. Let the thin veil slide down. We are surrounded! We are in the company of all in Christ who have gone before us, and all now gathered in Christ around the earth.

We hear in the Book of Revelation today a glorious vision of the saints of God before Christ's throne.

- They have been made whole
- Their suffering is now gone
- They cleansed, filled, held, beloved
- They are adoring Christ the Lamb, the Light, the Lover of all creation

What a beautiful, powerful vision. What a vision God opens for us, and for the early followers of Jesus in such a world of cruelty and suffering. In this world, there is so much suffering – such a world that will not easily receive the gift of God's good news and the call to God's new creation. There is so much suffering – such a world that will not make space for a new way of seeing and being – such a world where the poor are always supposed to be poor and ashamed, the slaves are always supposed to be dispossessed, the weak deserve their lot in life.

Who are your saints? Who are the martyrs, the teachers, the wisdom-bringers, the bold advocates and defenders, the brave lovers of people and creatures, the witnesses, the constant care-givers, the clean and bright ones?

Who are they?

What do they call you to?

Do you know that they are part of our fellowship in Christ Jesus – across all times, spanning the world?  
Do you know that we are united with them, even now?

They are our company, across the great divide of death.

They await the great final resurrection, and even now in God's eternal embrace pray for us and cheer us on.

Great and small. Well-known and unknown. Remembered around the world through time, and remembered by a few in small places – and so many forgotten. But their gifts live on. Their words uttered, their kindnesses and wisdom given, their invitations to come near to Christ and to embrace the Holy Spirit's movement, have sown seeds that have grown, flourished, and are still bearing fruit.

Who do you remember as saints, today? What are they calling forth in you? And, what do you want them to pray for, for us who toil and wrestle here and now in this earthly life?

“These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

Who are those you have known or learned about, who have gone through suffering, scorn, and deep sorrows in this life, whose faith and love has shown you the face of Christ? Can you see them now, washed clean, in comfort and joy and loving adoration as they move in God's presence?

Sainthood is our journey, and our destination – even now. As we heard from the first letter of John, “Beloved, we are God's children **now**... and when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.” We are fully embraced by God now. Do you sense and know for yourself that embrace – that love? You are God's child **now**. We, together, are God's children **now**. And, when Jesus is revealed, whenever and wherever that may be in this life and the next, we will be like him. In that moment, and then for all eternity.

So, what marks a saint? It begins with Jesus' charter, his manifesto, for the Kingdom of Heaven. It begins with who and what Jesus names as blessed.

Note who are the blessed.

- Poor
- Merciful
- Mourners
- Hungry for Righteousness
- Pure
- Peacemakers
- Persecuted
- Scorned

This list of Jesus does not include

- The arrogant
- The vengeful
- The giddy and gleeful
- The morally disinterested or morally superior
- The warmongers
- The cruel and spiteful
- Those who think they are deserving or are treated as deserving

Keep this in mind, in the days ahead as we tumble through this volatile national election. Keep in mind what kind of character and quality mark the people of God's Kingdom, and what kind of character and quality seems to get applauded, exalted, or excused in the eyes of the world around us. What does this world – this nation – value, and how does that compare with what Jesus calls blessed?

Friends, Jesus' words are not offered simply as some quiet consolation, like a first-century Hallmark card. Jesus' words are a declaration. Jesus charts and sets claim for a new reality – a new world, but a world that has always been in the reality of the Kingdom of God. Here, gathered on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, are people from all across the region, the poor, the lame and sick and diseased, the foreigners and outsiders, and those who cared for them and interacted with them, as well as those who yearned for a way to follow God more closely and to find the deeper truth of living. Jesus declares to THEM – to ALL of them – “You, who are poor in spirit, who mourn, who are meek, YOU are blessed. You will be given the earth, and the strengthening of people standing with you. You, who seek God's path, who simply desire and follow God, and who show this with mercy and peace-making, YOU are blessed. You will find the God you seek, in the company of others. THIS is the beginning of the Kingdom of Heaven, among you, here and now, together. And any of you who are scorned and treated cruelly, know that God holds you.”

No matter what kind of world we find ourselves in, the Kingdom of Heaven is beginning. The blessed are not the shiny! They are not the famous or the glorified in the eyes of the world. The blessed are those who seem to have little and yet are lifted up – and the blessed are those who take seriously God's call to open the gates of the Kingdom, to comfort and support and strengthen and champion those gripped with sorrows and suffering, to level the rough places and stake claims on this earth for the meek. Remember, this teaching in Matthew is the front bookend of a series of important teachings of Jesus. At the other end of Matthew, we find Jesus painting a picture of final judgment of the nations, dividing them as sheep from goats. What is the dividing line there? “I was hungry and you fed me, naked and you clothed me, in prison and you visited me.” The blessed are blessed because they will not be left alone. They are blessed because the Kingdom of God is completed in circle by those who will bring comfort and strengthening, who show mercy, who will feed and fill others. WE are called to fulfill Jesus' promises of blessedness in the Beatitudes, by how we offer ourselves for the sake of the world around us.

We are called to sainthood – to lives devoted to Jesus and his Way of Love. All our heart, soul, mind, and strength given in love to God. All our selves given in love to others, sharing God's goodness in all we say and do.

What kind of saint are you becoming? What is God calling you toward, so that you might become more fully like Christ? Where are you being called to sow seeds, to share and care, to bring the good news to others that they, too, are blessed, welcomed into the Kingdom of Light and Life?