

For All the Saints
Revelation 7:9-17; Matthew 5:1-12; Psalm 34
All Saints' Day

Psalm 34

¹I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

²My soul makes its boast in the LORD;
let the humble hear and be glad.

³O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.

⁴I sought the LORD, and he answered me,
and delivered me from all my fears.

⁵Look to him, and be radiant;
so your faces shall never be ashamed.

⁶This poor soul cried, and was heard by the LORD,
and was saved from every trouble.

⁷The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,
and delivers them.

⁸O taste and see that the LORD is good;
happy are those who take refuge in him.

⁹O fear the LORD, you his holy ones,
for those who fear him have no want.

¹⁰The young lions suffer want and hunger,
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

²²The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Matthew 5:1-12

⁵When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Revelation 7:9-17

⁹After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰They cried out in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!” ¹¹And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²singing, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?” ¹⁴I said to him, “Sir, you are

the one that knows.” Then he said to me, “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. ¹⁵For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. ¹⁶They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; ¹⁷for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

The Sermon

There it is, right in the middle of the closing sentence of the Apostles’ Creed:

“I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy catholic church, *the communion of saints*, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

Today in the Church calendar is All Saints’ Day. The middle line of the hymn we’ll sing at the end of today’s service, which is composed as a prayer, is this:

“O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle; they in glory shine;
yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.”ⁱ

Who are the saints who shine in glory to light your path?

As we head into election week, I remember an episode of *The West Wing*, a TV show from around 20 years ago about a fictional U.S. president and the goings-on in the White House. At the time, somebody in the press referred to it as our weekly “national civics lesson.”ⁱⁱ Someone else has described it as being a show about “the leader we didn’t quite deserve”ⁱⁱⁱ in the always morally upstanding *Jed Bartlet*.

One of my favorite scenes ever was when there was some urgent crisis going on, with paralyzing unknowns and no easy or clear resolution, and the president was hunched over the resolute desk with a cadre of high ranking advisors, and one of his senior aides came in and said that they needed an answer to a question about the president's upcoming re-election campaign. The question, which had come up earlier in an awkward interview with the presumptive opponent, was: Why do you want to be president? And the staff realized they didn't have a concise, one-sentence response for when the president would be asked the same thing.

So, into the Oval Office comes Deputy Chief of Staff Josh Lyman, who says: Mr. President, we need a response to the question of why you want to be president.

And Bartlet pokes his head out of the huddle and says: "I *don't* want to be president."

I don't remember Josh's exact response, but it was to the effect of, "OK, we'll run that by the focus group and see how it goes over."

Whoever is in that office needs our prayers, and I specifically remember Billy Graham speaking in Charlotte in 1996 about how he would respond when people would ask him "who he was for" in that year's election. He said: I'm *for* anybody who's got the courage to offer themselves up for public office.

Braver Angels is a group that identifies themselves as "the nation's largest grassroots movement uniting red and blue Americans in a working alliance to depolarize America."^{iv} They recently commissioned a survey which found that 70% of their respondents, Republican and Democrat, said they believe America is facing the prospect of potentially permanent harm, whether they're saying it about one party winning in November or the other. ^v

And the exact same proportion, 70%, also said the most important job after the election is to heal our enmity.^{vi}

If that survey is anywhere remotely close to an accurate reflection, a supermajority of our population wants us, together, to heal our animosity, estrangement and antagonism. We don't have answers right now for how to make that happen. But most people hunger for it. That's a start.

Just this week, someone reminded me of one of the poetic prayers in Ted Loder's transformative collection from 36 years ago, *Guerillas of Grace*, and although I thought I had long since read the life out of every prayer in that book, this one feels new to me, and it feels like it's relevant to a lot of people right now.

Sometimes, Lord,
it just seems to be too much:
too much violence, too much fear;
too much of demands and problems;
too much of broken dreams and broken lives;
too much of war and slums and dying;
too much of greed and squishy fatness
and the sounds of people
devouring each other
and the earth;
too much of stale routines and quarrels,
unpaid bills and dead ends;
too much of words lobbed in to explode
and leaving shredded hearts and lacerated souls;
too much of turned away backs and yellow silence,
red rage and the bitter taste of ashes in my mouth.

Sometimes the very air seems scorched
by threats and rejection and decay

until there is nothing
but to inhale pain
and exhale confusion.

Too much of darkness, Lord,
too much of cruelty
and selfishness
and indifference...

Too much, Lord,
too much,
too bloody,
bruising,
brain-washing much.

Or is it too little,
too little of compassion,
too little of courage,
of daring,
of persistence,
of sacrifice;
too little of music
and laughter
and celebration?

O God,
make of me some nourishment
for these starved times,
some food for my brothers and sisters
who are hungry for gladness and hope,
that, being bread for them,
I may also be fed
and be full.^{vii}

Richard Rohr has said: “In our time we have to find a way to disestablish ourselves, to identify with our powerlessness instead of our power, our dependence instead of our independence, our communion instead of our individualism. Unless we understand that, the Sermon on the Mount...isn’t going to make any sense...”

“When we’re protecting our self-image as moral, superior, or ‘saved’ persons, we always lose the truth. The daring search for God—the common character of all religion—is replaced with the search for personal certitude and control.

“As soon as people are comfortably enjoying the fruits of the established system, they don’t normally want any truth beyond their comfort zone. Yet those who are not enjoying those benefits, those who have been marginalized or oppressed in any way, are always longing and thirsting for the coming of the Kingdom, for something more. The Gospel always keeps us in a state of longing and thirsting for God. Grace seems to create a void inside of us that only God can fill.”^{viii}

God has put each of us here specifically to be the people we were created to be in our own specific time.

As Mordecai said to Esther in Esther 4:14: “Who knows? Perhaps you have come to [the position you are in right now] for just such a time as this.”

Those who came before us learned to say from those who came before them,

“O magnify the LORD with me,
and let us exalt his name together.
This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord,
and was saved from every trouble.”

They learned from those who came before them in the long succession going back to those who could have heard Jesus say directly:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness;
they will be filled.

“Blessed are the merciful; they will receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart; they will see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.”

They learned from those came before them and passed it down to us so
that we would share it with the communion of saints yet unborn,

that “the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of the water of life,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

“O God,
make of me some nourishment for these starved times,
some food for my siblings who are hungry for gladness and hope,
that, being bread for them, I may also be fed and be full.^{ix}

Amen.

Keith Grogg
Montreat Presbyterian Church
Montreat, NC
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ⁱ William Walsham How, “For All the Saints,” 1864

ⁱⁱ I’ve long since forgotten who, but perhaps David Brooks

ⁱⁱⁱ Rob Sheffield, “The 100 Greatest TV Shows of All Time” (Rolling Stone, RS1271, October 6, 2016), 31

^{iv} <https://braverangels.org/hat/>

^v <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/29/opinion/joe-biden.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>

^{vi} <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/29/opinion/joe-biden.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>

^{vii} Ted Loder, “Sometimes it Just Seems to Be Too Much,” in Loder, *Guerillas of Grace* (LuraMedia, 1984)

^{viii} Richard Rohr, “A Church on the Margins” CAC daily email, September 28, 2020

^{ix} Loder, “Sometimes it Just Seems to Be Too Much”