

MIXED BLESSING

God of all people from every tribe and language; you call true witnesses who sing your praise, live your grace and work for peace: may we share their faith and know our need for you that we might be a blessing to the hunger of your world; through Jesus Christ, whose body we are.

A Collect for All Saints' Day, Prayers for An Inclusive Church

ALL SAINTS' SUNDAY

Ecclesiasticus 44:1-10, 13-14; Psalm 34:1-10, 22; 1 John 3:1-3; Matthew 5:1-12

NOVEMBER 5, 2017

ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY

EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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THE GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 5:1-12

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

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

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

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

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

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

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

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

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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

All Saints' Sunday is a time to recall those who have gone before us – those whose lives and deaths continue to be in our consciousness – perhaps people who have been exemplars to us, people we may view as “saints” whether formally recognized as such or not, as well as family members, friends, pets and

also people we never knew who have died in our community, in the wider world, in violence, in natural disaster....

This may be challenging to do as we are often distracted and we move beyond consciousness of these beings who have been in the world with us... so we are shifting

gears a bit to remember, to recall....

We gather these cards to place them on the altar... “Sacred to the memory...” from old gravestones....

We can also keep in mind that all of these are still with us in a variety of ways. The Irish poet and philosopher John O’Donohue said, “the dead are our nearest neighbors....”

As we reflect on these lives and on our own lives and the lives of those around us this All Saints’ Sunday, I invite you to wonder if I have lost my mind by beginning this sermon in exactly the same way I began last week’s sermon...

In her book, *Braving the Wilderness, The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*, author and social scientist Brené Brown writes:

“Spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion.

“We seem to have forgotten that even when we’re utterly alone, we’re connected to one another by something greater than group membership, politics, and ideology— that we’re connected by love and the human spirit. No

matter how separated we are by what we think and believe, we are part of the same spiritual story.”

From last week’s gospel reading: Jesus said: “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Today, we hear in the gospel some of the best known words of Jesus, eight blessings that came to be known as the beatitudes from the Latin word for blessing, *beati*, and were spoken by him to a crowd of people from a small hill near the Sea of Galilee and Capernaum in modern day Israel.

Taken together, these blessings express much of the wisdom that Jesus taught, each with a condition and an outcome or result. In looking at them together, we can see that blessing is a mixed blessing. Each one of these blessings in some way grates on our ears, our minds. Do we want to be blessed by being poor in spirit, by mourning, by hungering and thirsting (for righteousness or in any other way), by being merciful, or peacemakers, or persecuted for righteousness? Are these the values of our world, of our culture? Are these the sorts of things we strive for, or are raising our children to embrace?

So Jesus is revealing a world beyond where we typically live, or where we may, impulsively, feel we want to live...

Mixed blessing – real whether we want it or not.

Worlds within worlds.
Worlds beyond our world.

And that is how I think of each of us.... Looking around us now, we may remember to see people for who they are, not who we think they are.... This is to say that each of us is vastly more complex than we want to acknowledge about ourselves and that we want to acknowledge or embrace in the other.

Though God is all about complexity and is all about change.

And invites us into mixed blessing, into seeing blessing in places we may expect and in ways we want, as well as in ways that don't seem like a blessing at all.

Life disrupts all of the ways in which we want life to be simple and straightforward and draws us, sometimes kicking and screaming, out of ourselves and out of what can be quite single-minded focus on our own perspectives and our own wants and needs, our own ideas and identifications....

At our worst, we objectify and dehumanize ourselves and those around us – the source of a great deal of the suffering and pain we

bring into our own lives and that allows the sort of random death and destruction we are witnessing daily, including terrorism and the phenomenon of abuse and harassment that has been part of the human experience in all cultures for a very long time, but, in the midst of so much that we no longer want to tolerate, is also entering our minds, consciousness, and conversation as intolerable.

Each of us is a world with worlds within us. Worlds of what we have, of our potential, of our essential goodness as well as our experiences of loss, of failure. We are all we have sensed, all that is enfleshed in life generally, in our lives specifically, as well as all that will always elude us, that we will never attain, all that we know, all of our confusion.

Last week I offered this quote from John O'Donohue that Brené Brown includes in *Braving the Wilderness*. He writes: “Only holiness will call people to listen now. And the work of holiness is not about perfection or niceness; it is about belonging, that sense of being in the Presence and through the quality of that belonging, the mild magnetic of implicating others in the Presence.... This is not about forging a relationship with a distant God but about the realization that we are all already within God.”

We are rightly suspicious of “religion” these days, but there is an old religious custom of genuflection, bending the knee before the sacrament, the blessed bread and wine, as a sign of recognition, respect, and adoration.

I mention it because it seems like we should each genuflect before one another and before each other person, to recognize, respect, and honor the worlds within each of us, all of the ways in which we are blessed, in which we are blessings and the hard-won ways in which we discover life and discover ourselves as mixed blessings.

Yes, we are mixed blessings, inextricably connected to one another, the living to the dead, in

love and compassion, all already within God.

Today, together, we baptize Gwendolyn Jane Tipich, who, at age 4, already has worlds within her. This baptism, each baptism is a genuflection (to mix religious metaphors), is a sign that we recognize, with God, all that she is, all that she will be, our inextricable connection with her in love and compassion, and the reality that she is already and will always be within God, where she came from and where she is going – God, her journey and her journey’s end.

Her baptism is an invitation to her and to all of us to awaken to the vast blessing, the mixed blessing of life



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