

All Saints Sunday – November 3, 2013
Text: Matt 5: 1-12
Theme: "Who's Blessed?"

Blessed. We use that word a great deal. I hear many times a week how blessed someone is, especially if I have Moody radio on in the car. People will be on there talking about how blessed they were to have all manner of calamity befall them and how because of their great faith, God blessed them and now they are doing beautifully. When people start talking about what a blessing it is to be a Christian, I always think of my friend Duane. We were at a seminary cocktail party which we were instructed to call a "fellowship event," so that none of the pietists would get upset over the seminarians drinking alcohol. At these events, there was always much talk about being blessed. One little seminary wife who had thus far never encountered anything worse in life than a run in her hose was telling Duane how blessed we all were. What she did not know was Duane's history. Duane glared at her over his sixth beer and all of us who had gone to college with Duane knew what was coming...fireworks! See Duane had retired from the Marine Corps when he became a Christian because he decided to be a pastor. He went to college and during college, his wife had died from cancer and he was left to raise 4 kids. Right after his wife died, they discovered that his daughter had a serious heart condition and

during the first year of seminary, Duane had been diagnosed with bladder cancer. This all, of course, was on top of trying to go to grad school and raise four kids on a meager government check. So Duane looked at that poor little sem wife and said.

“Blessed? Are we blessed? Well my wife died of cancer before she was 40. My little girl has a heart condition, and she may not see 20. Last year, I was diagnosed with bladder cancer and now I pee out of tube on my side, wanna see it?” The woman was stammering and backing away as Duane grinned at her and started to untuck his shirt. “Now that is all on top of the fact that I’m trying to learn how to parse a Hebrew verb, keep our apartment squared away, drill my boy on his times tables, read a bedtime story to my daughter and wonder if we can squeeze four bowls of cereal out of a ½ quart of milk that’s left! OH BOY DO I FEEL BLESSED! God is a real peach!” By this time she had backed to the door and scurried off to find her husband. We all had another beer with Duane.

But Jesus isn’t promising blessings in this life is he? He is not saying that if we follow him, life will be a rose garden. He is recognizing that this life is difficult and that we *are* poor in spirit, in mourning, involved in conflict, persecuted. That’s life, and as we celebrate our 100th All Saints Day as a congregation, it is a good time

to remember what *IS* promised in the Beatitudes. Not that we will have a peachy life on earth, but that our real home awaits us with God and all the saints who have preceded us home the past 100 years.

Remember who is blessed and what being blessed is. Blessed, in Matthew does not refer to material matters, but salvation. Are we blessed? Absolutely! We are blessed because Christ gave his life and soul for us to prepare a place for us in paradise. But wait, that's not all as they say on the late night ads on TV. The reality of our salvation does bring us material blessings. We are blessed in knowing the end of the story. We know that we are headed for a place where there will be no more conflict, sadness and heartache. And not only that but we will be with all the people we love.

Knowing all of that changes our priorities so that we can relax a little in this life. Most of the stuff we worry about and stress over does not really matter. So what if little Johnny fails Geometry. I guarantee you he won't need it in paradise and the point of education is not to master knowledge but to explore the capabilities of the brains we have been given. So what if you can't pay the mortgage. It's just a house! Let the bank have it. Move on and glorify God wherever you live. Obviously the list could go on and on

with examples of our spiritual poverty, oppression, hunger and conflict but the point is, Jesus has taken care of all that. He died on the cross, paid for our sins and secured our eternal life. The word promises us this. The body and blood of Christ strengthen our faith in this promise and that is how we make it through the day as the people of God. Sometimes the only thing that gets you through a really horrible day is remembering that a hot meal, a warm bed and your family awaits you at home. Remember also that at the end of all the days, paradise with all the saints, everyone you love, awaits you as well.