All the Saints

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 1 November 2026

1 John 3:1-3 • Matthew 5:1-12



1 John 3:1-3: See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he[a] is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. 3 And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

Matthew 5:1-12: When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then 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. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

The Beatitudes are not instructions or recommendations of how to be; they are statements about the way Christians are. When Jesus says, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit,” he is saying to the disciples: Because you follow me and are meek, you will inherit the kingdom of heaven. William Barclay tells us:

> The beatitudes in effect say: ‘O the bliss of being a Christian! O the joy of following Christ! O the sheer happiness of knowing Jesus Christ as Master, Saviour and Lord!’[1]

Jesus is rejoicing in his disciples. We, too, should be joyful about being Christians. From where else would our happiness come, except from God, from whom all blessings flow? So, as Christians, we are poor in spirit, mournful, meek, hungry and thirsty for righteousness, merciful, and pure in heart. Because we are these things, we are blessed; and we are blessed because we are these things. The blessings follow: we will see the kingdom of heaven; we will be comforted; we will inherit the earth; we will see God; and we are the children of God. Our reward will be great in heaven.

This is what we are and what we have and what we will have, because we are Christians. And what is a Christian? We might say a Christian is one who follows Christ; but does that mean that we follow Christ perfectly? I think the best definition is: one who *tries* to follow Christ. “Tries to follow,” because of course none of us is perfect. We try to do as Christ would have us do, but we often fail. If we had to be perfect in order to be a Christian, there wouldn’t be any Christians. So Jesus’ words in the Beatitudes are hugely encouraging. If we are sincerely trying to follow Christ, then all these good things are ours.

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[1] Barclay, William, *Matthew, Vol 1* (Kindle edition), p138.

Some of the words in the Beatitudes may confuse us, so let us look at them.

Central to being a Christian is that we put God above everything and everyone else. This is what is meant by being "poor in spirit." It does not mean weak or colourless, and it is not an instruction to feed and take care of the poor (although Jesus asks us to do this too). The Greek word for "poor" used in the Gospel refers to abject poverty. It is applied to someone who has nothing. In our context it points to the fact that a Christian, without God, has nothing. All our joy and blessings come from God; all our sustenance — our daily bread — comes from God. By ourselves, if we don't have God's Spirit in us, we are poor. But when we accept Christ and are filled with God's Spirit, our own spirit rejoices, and we have everything — including the kingdom of heaven.

Another perhaps confusing word is "meek." In common usage, a meek person is one who never disagrees, never puts up any fight, just lets things happen to them. That's not exactly what Jesus meant. Meekness implies obedience and modesty, and loving God does require obedience to God. We serve God. Our wants are not so important. What God desires is what guides our lives. Accepting that requires modesty and self-effacement. This doesn't fit in our society, where everyone talks about rights and living your own life as you want. A Christian follows God and serves God willingly and modestly. The opposite is what Jesus once said about the Pharisees:

> Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.
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> (Matthew 23:5-7)

This is the opposite of meekness. The Pharisees had set their own importance above God's. Meekness as Jesus defines it is not shameful; it is a realistic recognition of God's sovereignty. It was the same in the parable of the dinner, when Jesus tells us not to take the high place at table, for the host will come and send you down lower. No, it is best to be humble and take the lowest place, for then the host — or God — may lift you higher (Luke 14:7-11).

Today, on All Saints' Day, we recognise not only the name of our church, but we recognise all our fellow Christians. For we are all saints. Saints are not just the people whom the Catholic Church beatifies, like St Mary or Saint Teresa or Saint Christopher. Those people did extraordinary service for God. But all of us are saints, for we all serve God. We serve God in humility, in mercy, in purity of heart, in our hunger for righteousness, and in joy. And we will be called children of God. Thanks be to our merciful and loving Father in heaven. Amen.