Text: All Saints, Matt 5:1-12

**Introduction**

All Saints is one of my favorite days on the calendar. First might be part of being a pastor, the saints are so marvelous in their variety that there really needs to be a day for All of them. Sin ultimately all comes from three places: the devil, the world or our own nature. And it all has the same goal, temporal advantage in exchange for eternal damnation. It’s boring. The saints are a constant surprise.

Second though is that All Saints has a hymn that goes right on the Mt. Rushmore of hymns. It gets it right. Our hope is not just that golden evening in the west when faithful warriors get their rest. Our hope is that yet more glorious day. It also gets that soul deep need to occasionally hear that distant triumph song. Right when you think you’ve lost the tune, there it is on the breeze or being sung by someone in a new key. And hearts are brave again and arms are strong.

But that harmony of our final hope (the church triumphant in the resurrection), an interim state of rest (the church at rest), and a life-long warfare (the church militant), brings into the spotlight a couple of conceptions of sainthood.

I think the general conception of the saint probably got its best most recent definition by Jor-El. It’s the monolog at the start of The Man of Steel. “You will give the people of Earth an ideal to strive towards. They will race behind you, they will stumble, they will fall. But in time, they will join you in the sun, Kal. In time, you will help them accomplish wonders.” Its an aristocratic understanding of the saint. If we shine the light on the best of us, we all feel better (yea us!), maybe we do better. And the church has never shied away from this in the past. Books full of the stories of martyrs and saints have been around basically since the church has been. You could even point at the book of Acts as the divinely inspired version of this. The story of Stephen’s martyrdom often serving as the pattern.

But there is a hidden or at least not immediately apparent problem with this common aristocratic definition. The vast majority of us aren’t Kryptonian. If we look at say the life of Mother Theresa, it doesn’t seem possible. And if those lives are generations apart, that distant triumph song and seem distant indeed. And the flip side of spotlighting the Saints wearing S’es on the their chests is that we might get the idea that we can outsource everything to them. That is something of the perversion that set off Luther on indulgences. The indulgence gave you credit from “the treasury of the saints”. They produced so much good works that you could just purchase the overflow to make up for your lack.

I don’t want to downplay too much that heroic conception of the saint. We need that. As the Apostle Paul once told her hearers, “you follow me as I follow Christ.” Those of us in the church militant need the stories that sound a clear strong trumpet. But the deeds even of the saints are secondary things in the light of eternity.

**Text**

There is a second conception of the saint that I think is more important. And it is one that finds it’s seat in the beatitudes. And in the final hope of all the saints – the church triumphant.

The beatitudes, this list of “blessed are…” statements, are the opening to the Sermon on the Mount. The gospel according to Matthew is a book that is organized around 5 sermons of Jesus, and the Sermon on the Mount is the first of them. You could call it the constitution of the Kingdom of God. And the beatitudes are the poetic prologue. Where the American constitution begins “we the people, in order to form a more perfect union”, Jesus starts with these statements of blessing.

And the most important one is the very first one. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom.” Blessed can mean a bunch of things. #blessed today is often used in either a sarcastic way or a humble brag. My cat just threw up a hairball at my feet #blessed. 100 people coming to Thanksgiving dinner at our place, 2 25 pound birds to cook. #blessed. Blessed can be used in a cutting way – bless your heart, meaning something more like a curse. The word that Jesus uses could mean something as simple as happy. It was more often something like fortunate, as in the goddess fortune smiled on you. Jesus grabs it at the far end I think, “close to God.” Blessed, Close to God are the poor in Spirit.

Who are the poor in Spirit? Those that realize the Kingdom is not only or even primarily for the heroes. Those crushed by those expectations. Those who realize they are never going to be “that guy or gal.” Those who have lost the tune. Those who feel less than fortunate, #blessed. Close to God are those who know they are sinners and can’t fix it themselves.

Why? How are these people the closest to God? Why are the last first and the first last? Because God has chosen to give them the kingdom. Close to God are the sinners who know it, because the Kingdom is theirs. Jesus has come for these. The grace and love of God has been poured out upon them.

None of us deserve it. God has chosen us in Christ. The Kingdom is a gift of grace.

And if you look at the rest of these blessed statements, they are not the stuff of heroes. They tend to the universal.

The day of mourning comes for all of us. Yet this brings us close to God, for we shall be comforted. And if not here, then in that day of rest. In Jerusalem the Golden.

The world has a way of putting us all in our place, making us meek, and if it hasn’t yet for you, just wait. Yet know in that moment you are close to God, because you are the heirs of this earth that he is going to remake. From earth’s wide bounds to ocean’s farthest coast.

Justice – that hunger and thirst for righteousness - is always around, yet so rarely found. Yet the arc of the universe bends toward it, because that countless host will stream in those gates of pearl. The Lamb sits on the throne and his justice will not fail.

The things of the saints, the blessed, are universal. Today, the Kingdom is ours. And today the Kingdom suffers violence. Today we carry the cross. But The Father will redeem it all. Our warfare will give way to rest. And that long rest will in the twinkling of an eye give way to the no longer distant triumph song. The saint, the blessed, is most defined by faith that God keeps his promises.

The saints are not just the heroes, but the saints are the countless host who believe this. Who believe that God has given us His kingdom. That God has drawn near to the poor in spirit. That God will keep his promises. The saints are not so by work, but they are the knights of faith.

**Application**

The kingdom has been given to you by grace. You are not the hero of the story. That is Christ. Even the heroes cast down their crowns when he passes by.

But that frees us to be saints.

Mercy, purity of heart, peacemakers, persecuted. None of those are things that we are good at by nature. None of those are things that if you care about the kingdoms of this world would I suggest you pursue. Mercy will get you killed. Purity of heart is a liability you can’t afford. Peacemaking doesn’t bring glory. If you want the world and its glory, these are not the traits of it’s heirs.

But they are the traits of our Captain – Jesus. Of such is His Kingdom.

Your place in that Kingdom doesn’t come by how good you are at them. None of us are very good. Even the artistocrats we shine the light on would be the first to admit it. We can always return to that first line of the blessed – the poor in spirit.

But Jesus’ list that start with God being closest to those poor in spirit – the kingdom is theirs right now – ends with another. God draws nearest to the persecuted for righteousness sake – the kingdom is theirs right now.

We can live under the constitution of the Kingdom of God right now. It doesn’t bring temporal rewards. In this militant place it’s a rebel kingdom. But only those deeds will last. There is only one eternal King. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. Amen.