The Festival of All Saints
St. Matthew 5:1-12
1 November, Anno Domini 2026

Blessed saints of God,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There is a very important grammatical distinction to be noted within the Beatitudes. Those whom Jesus tells us are blessed are blessed now. He doesn't say that they will only be blessed some time in the future. They are blessed now even as they appear to be cursed. But, in the blessing of the poor in spirit and those persecuted for righteousness' sake, Jesus assures them of another current reality. He says that the kingdom of heaven is theirs. That is true right now in the midst of the poverty and the persecution. It looks and feels like they have nothing, but Jesus tells them they have a kingdom now, the kingdom of God, a kingdom of grace and mercy and help in times of need. The other Beatitudes, while affirming the current blessedness of the one described, describe conditions that will only be realized in the future…they will be comforted, they will inherit the earth, and so on. These things will only be theirs when they are called away from this valley of sorrow or Christ returns for judgment.

Why do I point out these grammatical distinctions? Because they matter. The Holy Spirit very specifically and purposefully distinguished between what is now in the present and what will be in the future. And if we simply gloss over these points, we will be robbing ourselves of rich promises and comfort which offers to His beleaguered Church. We won't be able to properly understand our life as Christians in this world and will either look for the wrong blessings or fall into despair over our sufferings.

This is certainly not the first time the the Lord turns our expectations on their heads, nor will it be the last. As we remember today the faithful who have gone before us, who now rest from all eerie labors and no longer have to taste any of the sorrows of this life, something which it is only natural to be at least a little jealous of, it is important to remember that here in this world their lives, like ours, were filled with trials and tribulations. They, of course, didn't have the same joy and peace that they are experiencing now. They are comforted now, but here they endured mourning. They struggled against their own sin and the sins of others against the. They endured the devil's constant harassment and temptation. They build

loved one, felt pain, fought error in the church, heard the jeering of the world against Christ and even felt the intense pressure of the world to bend and conform. They endured loss and gave up rights for the sake of peace and to show mercy. They made choices for themselves and their families that friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, and teammates didn't understand and even punished. The multitude of saints whose mouths are filled with endless shouts of joy and praise and whose eyes are freed from tears, who will never know suffering, sickness, pain, or death ever again knew those things in abundance while they were here on earth just like their Lord and just like you and me.

And much of what they suffered was precisely because of the hope that they had in Christ. Much of their sorrow was because they sacrificed the pleasures and treasures of this life in order to strive after and not be distracted or led astray from the treasures of God's kingdom. Of course, they were not sinless. Their sin was part of what they mourned and hated - the sinful desires and thoughts of their hearts and minds that waged endless ware against the new man who had been raised to life in them by the Holy Spirit in Baptism. They hungered and thirsted for righteousness because they knew well that they had none of their own and they longed to be free of temptation and sin. They didn't trust in themselves. Rather, they knew and rejoiced that they had been washed clean in the Bloo of the Lamb. They confessed their sin because they believed that Jesus had suffered and died for them. They opened their mouths wide and often to receive the atoning Body and Blood which Jesus offered for them on the cross and bids His children to now eat and drink for the forgiveness of their sins.

The world despises the ones whom the Lord calls blessed. They curse and revile them. The world praises and rewards the proud, the ones who hunger and thirst for success and fame and strength and wealth, the boastful, the pleasure-seekers. These are the ones the world counts as blessed? Do we? Do we seek to be like them? Do we hold up before our children as those to be emulated? Do we encourage and even drive our children to chase after the things that the world praises as blessings while proudly declaring that we only want them to be happy and successful, which is really just code for wanting them to have a lot of money and nice things? Do we ourselves slave after worldly things and think that the blessed life is the one that is easy, free of suffering, free of the world's hatred and mockery?

Beloved of God, ALL of the blessed who now enjoy the rest of heaven, came out of tribulation. There are no exceptions, not even you. Let that comfort you. If anyone would be counted among those whom God says are blessed, that person will endure tribulation now in this world. That is why those two little verbs, is and are,

are so important. Faith in Christ now not his side of heaven, in this world broken by sin, in this flesh that is corrupted by sin, hunted by the devil who seeks to devour all in eternal death, means a life of tribulation. Faith will be resisted from within and from without. Faith will be persecuted. The truth will be mocked and many will seek to silence it. Christ and His people are hated by the world because we are a testament against their sin and unbelief. The Holy Spirit through St. Paul says of the enemies of Christ (and, mind you, he was in that instance, talking of those who were hiding with the visible church) "Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things." (Philippians 3:19) The cross of Jesus is abhorrent to them. And I don't mean by that only the wooden cross Jesus upon which Jesus atone for our sins, the cross which Jesus repeatedly refers to as His glory. I mean also the life of the cross, the life which is defined by dying to myself and what I want and what I like and what makes me happy right now. The godless want their best life now. They want nothing more from God than what they can obtain for themselves in this life. The thought of sacrificing their time, their sports, their games, or their jobs for family, for prayer, for the study of God's Word is embarrassing to them. The idea of sacrificing luxuries and comforts to provide for their family and neighbors and to support and spread the preaching of the Gospel is offensive and foolish them. The idea of forgiving freely this who have sinned against them or quietly bearing injustice with a good conscience is appalling to them because their own rights and honor are more important than the promises of God.

But Jesus tells you clearly, it is actually you who suffer these things on account of your trust in Him and your love of His Word who are the blessed one. You are the ones to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs this very hour even though it feels and may even appear as though God has completely rejected you from His kingdom. And to you who humble yourselves, who love forgiveness more than justice, who purposefully and actively pursue the things of righteousness, who take up the cross appointed to you by Christ, who despise your life in this world because you long to be with Christ in heaven, that He hastened to you by His own cross, who rejoice to suffer the scorn and hatred of Christ enemies and share in the suffering of your God, Jesus promise that you will one day have by sight the fullness of the blessedness which you have right now by faith. Here, now, your faith is tested and tried, purified in the furnace of affliction. Here, your vocation cal you out and away from yourself and your desires and your glory and personal exaltation. Here now, the devil relentlessly assaults you and taunts you and afflicts you so that you forsake the enteral inheritance of your heavenly Father's kingdom for something easier and more immediate.

But all of those things are coming to an end. So too is your suffering and your sorrow. On the day of Christ return, the unbelieving world which counted you in your weakness and humility as stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted and exalted themselves as the wise, the good, and the righteous will bow their heads with shame as you are revealed as the blessed one, the sons of God, and as you shine with God's own glory.

Beloved, what we are, are children of the most High God. What we will be has yet to be revealed but we know that we will be like God because we will see Him as He is and that the sufferings we endure now are not even worth comparing to the glory and the joy of eternity that Christ has prepared for us and seals to us as our inheritance in the Holy Supper. And here, today, this very hour, though we do not see it with our eyes in the midst of our appointed sojourning, we are enjoying a foretaste of John's vision because where Christ is, there is His Body, the Church - ALL of it. The faithful cloud of witnesses that has gone before us, some of whose names we will hear again shortly, stands all around us and with us, veiled from our sight. The prayers and praises of the whole Church, both Militant and Triumphant, the angels, the elder, the four living creatures, pour forth as one mighty voice giving glory and praise to God and to the Lamb. Together we are victorious. So let us follow their example of faithfulness in all virtuous and godly living as we march ever onward toward the glorious day when we too will leave our tribulation behind forever to receive our palm branches and behold God face to face.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.