

Sermon: A Glimpse Past the Chaos

Year C, All Saints

[Daniel 7:1-3, 15-18; Psalm 149; Ephesians 1:11-23; Luke 6:20-31](#)

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Rev. Catherine A. Merrill

We have lifted up the names of those saints who have gone before us: our parents, siblings and spouses, and, in deep grief, our children. We grieve the losses of teachers and scoutmasters, mentors and coaches, and even famous people we never met, but who inspired us. We miss them all the time, often catching ourselves on that sharp edge of grief, when we want to tell them something that only they would understand. But they have passed beyond our ability to catch their eye, hear their voice, be wrapped in that embrace that tells us that we are loved. So we grieve their loss. It's absolutely right to pause every now and again to feel that grief. Because once we get past the sorrow of never being wrapped in their scent again, that grief reminds us of a reality we tend to look away from.

This world is chaos and confusion. That's a terrifying reality, so we look away from it, to find ways of arguing that our corner of the world is holding together. We're fascinated by the chaos, starting into it, looking for patterns, looking for anything that we can latch onto to say, "see, it's not so bad." The way to linger with chaos is to stay cozy with idols of nationalism, consumerism, professionalism, imperialism, autonomy.¹ But the Jesus we see in Luke's Sermon on the Plain looks at his disciples (Luke 6:20), worried that they may be looking away from reality. So he lays it out straight and plain. He gives us two lists: the folks who are blessed and the ones who are looking at woe.

Most of the time, when we run through the list of those who are blessed – the poor, the hungry, the weeping, the shunned, (Luke 6:20-22) – we're not on that list. We're on the other list, the one with the rich, the full, the laughing, the well spoken of (Luke 6:24-26); we on the list with the woe. We're on that list because the wealth, the full pantries, the laughter, the good reputations mean we're not forced to see the world as it is. And if we don't see the world as it is, then we don't catch a glimpse of what God is doing.

Jesus knows which list sees the real world. Jesus knows because he was poor, hungry, grieving and shunned. Those people, who are being ground up by the real world, they know where true hope comes from.² It comes from looking away from the chaos and confusion, to what is even more real. Jesus wants his disciples, there on the plain in Galilee, here in Brookline, to share his irresistible conviction that God works homecoming in the midst of exile, God works creation in the midst of chaos, God works resurrection in the face of crucifixion.³ Jesus wants to be sure we have true hope, which can't come from wealth, food, laughter or praise from others. True hope is catching a glimpse of what God is up to, catching a glimpse of the new world.

The new world will not be a recurrence of old symptoms, old vicious cycles, old games people play, but a new mode of life marked by compassion, hospitality, justice, wholeness.⁴ And God

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living*. [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991], 317.

² Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*. [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001], 110.

³ Brueggemann, *Interpretation*, 318.

⁴ Brueggemann, *Interpretation*, 318.

will work it!⁵ But not on our timetable and not under our control. Without that oversight, we may miss it. We may never catch the glimpse we need. We may retreat into our bank accounts and walk in pantries, because it is so seductively reassuring to celebrate our security, our standard of living, our sound economy and ignore the reality of God's actions in this world.⁶

The people we remembered today, they weren't perfect. Some folks would argue that means they weren't saints. I disagree. It is not that saints are humans who have become divine. It is that saints are humans who have become fully human, fully the best that a human can be, fully attuned to life at its most meaningful.⁷ They weren't that way all the time. But they were that way enough of the time that they helped us catch a glimpse of the new world God is opening up to us.

We should grieve when we think of them, if for no other reason than it is so very hard to catch a glimpse of the new world God is inviting us to. After all the healing and feeding, after all the building up of those who were cast aside by society that Jesus did in his ministry smack in the middle of our earthly chaos, Jesus doesn't want us to be poor and hungry, grief stricken and shunned. Jesus wants us to be aware, not to be numbed or seduced by the wealth and plenty, by the laugh tracks and like-worthy lives on Facebook.

When we hear "blessed are you", we tend to think of happiness.⁸ Happiness is just too small a concept to encompass God's blessing. Blessed are you who have become fully human, fully open to life's meaning, not just the chaos and confusion, but the new things God is doing on God's schedule and in God's way. Blessed are you who trust in your full humanness enough that you will commit your wealth, your food, your laughter, your good reputations to bring forth more compassion, hospitality, justice and wholeness in this world. Blessed are you who have relationship with God that is not in jeopardy.⁹ Blessed indeed.

⁵ Brueggemann, *Interpretation*, 318.

⁶ Brueggemann, *Interpretation*, 315.

⁷ Joan Chittister, *Essential Writings*. Selected by Mary Lou Kowacki and Mary Hembrow Snyder. [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014], 215.

⁸ E. Elizabeth Johnson, "All Saints, Exegetical Perspective, Luke 6:20-31" in *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary, Year C, Volume 4*, ed. David L. Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 239.

⁹ Johnson, 241.