Sermon for All Saints’ Day (Observed), November 4, 2018

Matthew 5:1-12 (esp. v. 4)

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In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The Word of God which comforts us this morning is based on Matthew 5: “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

# It is proper to mourn a loved one’s death

It is good, right, and proper to mourn a loved one’s death. It is the appropriate response, because *they were not supposed to die*. We can only properly mourn when we acknowledge that death is never supposed to happen. Death is never good. Death is not what God intends for us. From the very beginning, we were supposed to live and not die.

In the Garden, God made Adam and Eve in such a way that they would not taste death. Then God said to them, “For on the day you eat of the fruit of that tree, you shall surely die.” In their innocence, Adam and Eve did not even know what death was, until they rebelled and fell headlong into it. And when Jesus returns, then *for us* death will be but a distant memory, like a bad dream, quickly forgotten in the daylight. After all, there is appointed a Day on which death itself will die, yielding way to eternal life.

But for now, death reigns. It’s not supposed to, but it does—and it’s our fault that it does. It swallows us up and digests us in its belly. It quickly takes our breath and slowly destroys our body.

But death cannot touch our soul—our hidden self. It cannot swallow our eternal life. The saints live on, in heaven with our Lord. The lives of the faithful are *hidden* in Christ Jesus. We cannot see them in their hiddenness. Death also has no knowledge of their enduring life. By all appearances, they have been defeated.

This is how it is with faith. This is why the faithful are blessed. Blessed are those who believe God’s promises, even though they do not yet have their reward.

# The life of faith is a life of suffering

Blessed are those whom the world counts “cursed.” The Kingdom of God is rooted in suffering and blood.

Blessed are those who are unsatisfied with the ungodly, who yearn for what is fallen to be restored. Blessed are those who are downtrodden and who need the Lord to lift them up, for he will. Blessed are those who give freely, for they will freely receive. Blessed are those who despise death, for they will soon be released from it.

“Blessed are those who are such-and-such, for God will soon give them this-and-that.” In most of these “blessed statements” at the opening of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that those who are in a bad condition now (because of the Gospel) will soon be in a much better condition. This is Jesus’ promise to his disciples and, by implication, to us. Jesus’ blessing is and must be a *promise* because we do not yet have the fulfillment—we do not yet have our reward. Like the saints of old, we cannot yet claim what is and will be ours. Instead, we appear to be cursed. We suffer. We yearn for what God has promised to us but which we do not yet have.

This is the life of faith. The life of faith *is* a life of suffering. It is a life of dissatisfaction with the world around us. It is a war with the fallen ideals of the status quo and of our Old Adam. It is a disappointment with “good enough” because we know the perfect *will* come. The life of faith is a burning desire for God to throw away the best we can offer, and to instead give us what is *truly good*.

# Jesus’ life of faith, suffering

The life of faith is a life of suffering. Nobody knows this better than Jesus. Jesus brought the end-times heavenly kingdom of God to earth. No suffering, no sickness, no pain, and no loss could stand before him. He gave us a preview of his end-times judgment and renewal: he banished demons, he restored health and life, and he himself was God dwelling among his people. He denounced all that was wrong with the world, and he promised what is soon coming. All this imagery we have in Revelation about the new heavens and the new earth was true *in* him and *through* what Jesus was doing in his earthly ministry. When Jesus is near, so is the kingdom of God.

But what did Jesus get for his tireless efforts? Suffering! He rejected the evil of the world, and the evil of the world rejected him right back. His hometown of Nazareth refused to see in him anything but the little boy who grew up there. He mourned the death of his friend John who was wrongly executed. Jesus was poor in spirit. He was hungry. He was homeless. He gave away all he had. He was merciful and a peacemaker, and yet was persecuted for righteousness’ sake, just like all the other prophets. Jesus was swallowed up by death.

Through all this, Jesus was blessed. Blessed are those whom the world counts cursed. The kingdom of God is rooted in suffering and blood. The life of faith is a life of suffering. To be blessed is to be crucified. It is to be dying and dead. Blessed are those who die in the Lord, for they have passed through this veil of tears.

# Death won’t last forever

Blessed are those who live and die and live again, trusting the Lord’s promises, for he keeps his Word. God will give his people what he has promised them: ours is the kingdom of heaven, we shall receive mercy, we shall be comforted through and beyond death, ours is the inheritance of the new earth, ours is a satisfying bounty of righteousness, and we will have the right to see God and stand in his presence because he has made us holy. These gifts are yours, as surely as Christ rose from the dead.

Christ was swallowed in death, but he conquered it. He trusted in the Lord’s promises, and he has now received his reward: he has risen from the dead in his own skin, now made incorruptible. Very soon, he will keep his promises to us, as well. He will destroy death. He will raise us to eternal life in incorruptible skin like his. He will restore all things to be just like he always intended for us, beginning way back in the Garden.

Sorrow will turn into joy. Faith will yield to sight. Promise will become possession. We will be satisfied, never going hungry or thirsty. And the Lamb himself will be our shepherd, and he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

# Conclusion

Dear friends in Christ, for now we live in faith and hope. That is to say, for now we do not yet have our reward. For now, we suffer, looking for the life of the world to come—the life promised, but not yet seen.

To be blessed in this world is to hate its brokenness. To be blessed is to be crucified along with Christ. It is to be dying. Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. Blessed are those who live and die and live again, trusting the Lord’s promises, for he keeps his Word. Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.