

All Saints Day

November 4, 2018

24th Sunday after Pentecost

23th Sunday after the Trinity Proper 26 (31)

Year B – the Gospel of Mark

Lutheran

Living the ^ Lectionary

*A weekly study of the Scriptures for the coming Sunday since May 4, 2014.
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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mZSUTeBwq4>

Hymn of the Day

Lutheran Service Book (LSB) 677 The Lutheran Hymnal (TLH) 463
“For all the saints who from their labors rest”

"For All the Saints" was written as a processional hymn by the Anglican Bishop of Wakefield, William Walsham How. The hymn was first printed in *Hymns for Saints' Days, and Other Hymns*, by Earl Nelson, 1864... The hymn was sung to the melody Sarum, by the Victorian composer Joseph Barnby, until the publication of the English Hymnal in 1906. This hymnal used a new setting by Ralph Vaughan Williams which he called *Sine Nomine* (literally, "without name") in reference to its use on the Feast of All Saints, 1 November (or the first Sunday in November, All Saints Sunday in the Lutheran Church). It has been described as "one of the finest hymn tunes of [the 20th] century."..."

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/For_All_the_Saints
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KrbU341Y7Y4> "Opening processional hymn of memorial service for Bishop Melvin E Wheatley, Jr. at Westwood United Methodist Church, Los Angeles"
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JUTILhFi-IY&start_radio=1&list=RDJUTILhFi-IY&t=41 Eleven minutes of an organist's improvisation on this melody. Mark Ferguson, Amateur Organist "The Cathedral Church Of St. John The Divine, NYC. Aeolian-Skinner Opus 150A (G. Donald Harrison) 1954"
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5_JipOkEnc "A Symphonic Band Arrangement of Sine Nomine"
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VDPZnRbCv4> Have to give Diane Bish her turn.

Commentaries have been chosen because the author has written in a way that compliments the reading. Not all of the commentaries are from Lutheran sources. They have been edited for length and in some cases for additional content that is not in keeping with a Lutheran understanding of Scripture. Links are provided for those who wish to read the entire commentary.

The Holy Bible, [English Standard Version \(ESV\)](#) Copyright © 2001 by [Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.](#)

All Saint's Day: Revelation 7: (2-8) 9-17; Revised Common Lectionary, (RCL), Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9 or Isaiah 25:6-9 (Next week: 1 Kings 17:8-16; RCL, the same reading from 1 Kings or Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17)

"...few Bible passages are as radiant with hope as Revelation 7 itself. Having begun the chapter with a curious gathering of 144,000 people representing 12,000 from each of the original tribes of Israel, John then tells us he sees a far vaster multitude—beyond the counting of it in fact—that fulfills what God promised to Abram way back in Genesis 12: through Abram's offspring (Israel), ALL nations would be saved. And indeed, John sees before him every ethnicity ever known. People of every shape and color, of every language and nationality form one gargantuan choir. Diverse though the choir is, their purpose is singular and unified: they are there to sing praises to the one true God and to the Lamb of God seated on the throne (and who John first spied in chapter 5). The accolades are heaped up higher and higher and on a constant basis.

Next up we discover just who these people are. They are the faithful of God who have passed through all the sufferings of life and all the persecutions the world could dish out. They have known hunger and want, pain and suffering, fear and death. History has seen the mighty river formed by their tears.

But no more! They will not know such things again, John is assured, because God has wiped every tear from every eye and those former things are over and done with, once and for all..."

- http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/easter-4c/?type=lectionary_epistle Scott Hoezee

² Then I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, ³ saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees, until we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." ⁴ And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

⁵ 12,000 from the tribe of Judah were sealed,
 12,000 from the tribe of Reuben,
 12,000 from the tribe of Gad,
⁶ 12,000 from the tribe of Asher,
 12,000 from the tribe of Naphtali,
 12,000 from the tribe of Manasseh,
⁷ 12,000 from the tribe of Simeon,
 12,000 from the tribe of Levi,
 12,000 from the tribe of Issachar,
⁸ 12,000 from the tribe of Zebulun,
 12,000 from the tribe of Joseph,
 12,000 from the tribe of Benjamin were sealed.

A Great Multitude from Every Nation

⁹ After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, ¹⁰ and crying out with a loud voice,

"Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹² saying,

"Amen
 Blessing
 and glory
 and wisdom
 and thanksgiving
 and honor
 and power

and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.”*

¹³ Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?” ¹⁴ I said to him, “Sir, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵ “Therefore they are before the throne of God,
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with
his presence.

¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore;
the sun shall not strike them,
nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd,
and he will guide them to springs of living water,
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

(Format has been edited some to reflect the [New Evangelical Translation](#), Copyright 1992, God's Word to the Nations Bible Society)

“When Revelation 7:9-17 is read as an isolated unit, much of its meaning is lost.

To grasp the passage's fuller meaning we need to go to chapter 6, where the first six seals on the scroll are opened. After the sixth seal is opened (verse 12), the physical foundations of creation are rattled. Destruction reaches such a pitch that all people hide. Key is their question in 6:17. Now that the day of wrath has come, "Who is able to stand?"

When John ... reaches that point in his visions, he stops. The suffering and destruction of the first six seals are overwhelming, and so he introduces a break, a timeout that he uses to lift the vision of God's people from the difficulties of the present to the glories of the future. In 7:1-8, the angels of God seal the 144,000. The sealing, with a likely reference to baptism, sustains the church on earth. The designation of twelve tribes times twelve thousand people per tribe envisions the church in this world as part of God's army in battle with the powers of evil. The opening vision of chapter 7, then, is of the church militant...

The fulcrum on which the passage balances is the difference between verse 4 and verse 9. In verse 4 John "heard the number." In verse 9 he "looked." What he sees is a vast international, multi-racial, multi-lingual throng of people so great that no one could count it. Although scholars differ in their understanding of how the people in 7:1-8 relate to the people in 7:9-17, I think that in the latter verses we have the church in heaven, or what we sometimes call the church triumphant.

John gives us a preview of the way things are to be. The people he sees wear white robes and carry palm branches. The robe is an important piece of clothing in the Bible. It signals not only outward clothing, but reveals who the person is, what her or his status is...Believers, then, wear the white robe of purity, and they carry palm branches as signs of victory and joy following war.

The "crying out" of the multitude in 7:10 connects us with 6:10, where impatient martyrs resting under the throne of God also cry out--in that case for justice. 7:10 gives an answer, as the unnumbered throng praises God. The word *salvation*, for which they praise God and the Lamb, is indeed in Greek the word *salvation*, but that term can also be used for *victory*, which would be appropriate in this view of the final future...

In verses 13-14 we have a temporary reversal of the way apocalyptic literature usually functions. One of the heavenly beings asks John the meaning of the vision. John appropriately turns the question back to the elder, who as the heavenly being is the one to interpret. The NRSV, unfortunately, mistranslates his response. "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal," should be translated as "these are they who are coming" The participle that means *coming* is present tense and refers to an ongoing action: those who are killed are still coming. Note that the church has not been "raptured" out (a non-biblical doctrine often foisted onto Revelation); the church suffers.

The martyrs, in one of John's reversal of images, "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."...

The preacher can easily skip over verses 15-17, but they contain great words of comfort. Believers stand before God's throne and worship God. God, in turn, will shelter them. The word translated as *shelter* is the word that also is translated as *dwelt* (21:3, e.g.). God's presence, God's *shekinah* in Old Testament terms, will remain with them...

In the final verse, John once more plays with language and images. It is the Lamb who will be the shepherd (also in 12:5, 19:15) who leads God's people to the "springs of the water of life." "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes" (see also 21:1-4).

With that vision in their minds and hearts, those who listen to the reading of Revelation are ready to experience the breaking of the seventh and final seal--which is followed immediately by the next cycle of seven end-time woes, that of the trumpets (8:1-2)...

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=568 [Walter F. Taylor, Jr.](#) Ernest W. and Edith S. Ogram Professor of New Testament Studies, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, Columbus, OH

*Required listening for verse 12: <https://vimeo.com/127451415> Handel's [Messiah](#)

Psalm 149; RCL, Psalm 24 (Psalm 146; RCL, Psalm 146 or Psalm 127)

"Presumably, Psalm 149 was chosen as the lectionary psalm for All Saints Day because the "saints" show up three times in this psalm (verses 1, 5, 9 NIV).

*Indeed, no other psalm has such a "triple play" of saintliness. In NRSV, these are the "faithful"; more significantly, in Hebrew, they are the *hasidim* (though this is not yet the eighteenth-century movement of mystical Judaism that now shares that name). (ESV translates as "godly")**

*What did it mean in biblical times to be *hasid*, a faithful one, a saint? The key has to be the adjective's relation to the noun: *hesed*, God's own "steadfast love." Thus, the "saints" in the Old Testament were those who lived in a mutual relationship of *hesed* with God. The relationship worked both ways. Primary, obviously, was God's own steadfast love -- pure undeserved gift and the basis of any possible human response or "saintliness": "The LORD, the LORD, a God*

merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin” (Exodus 34:6-7). In the Bible, sainthood is God’s work, first, last, and always...”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1825 **Fred Gaiser**
Professor Emeritus of Old Testament, Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minn.
- *Since “saints” is a key word today, take advantage of Bible Gateway’s feature that allows you to compare a given verse to 53 different translations:
<https://www.biblegateway.com/verse/en/Psalm%20149:1>

Sing to the LORD a New Song

149 Praise the LORD! (*Hallelujah*)

Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the **godly!**

² **Let** Israel be glad in his Maker;

let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!

³ **Let** them praise his name with dancing,

making melody to him with tambourine and lyre!

⁴ For the LORD takes pleasure in his people;

he adorns the humble with salvation.

⁵ **Let** the **godly** exult in glory;

let them sing for joy on their beds.

⁶ **Let** the high praises of God be in their throats

and two-edged swords in their hands,

⁷ **to execute** vengeance on the nations

and punishments on the peoples,

⁸ **to bind** their kings with chains

and their nobles with fetters of iron,

⁹ **to execute** on them the judgment written!

This is honor for all his **godly** ones.

Praise the LORD! (*Hallelujah*)

“This is a Hallelujah Psalm; it begins with, “Praise ye the Lord,” and finishes in the same way. It is a complete circle of praise. The long streams of the Psalms end in glorious cascades of hallelujahs. One after another these jubilant notes roll out, as in Handel’s magnificent Hallelujah Chorus.

Psalms 149:1... There was an old song previous to this new one, — in the 148th Psalm, — the Psalm for sun and moon and stars, for deeps and dragons, for old men and maidens, and so on; but this is a Psalm for saints, so it is “a new song” for the new creation. Therefore, let all the new creatures of God sing it from their hearts.

Psalms 149:2... This is the best and highest form of creation, — the making, not only of men, but of men of God, the making of Israels, the making of prevailing princes....Let them

rejoice that their Maker reigns, that he rules over them, and that he rules over all things: “Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.”

Psalms 149:3... That is, let them repeat the joy of Israel at the Red Sea, when Miriam “took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances; and Miriam answered them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.” So, O ye children of God, let the praises of your God and King ring out as with the music of the timbrel and harp.

Psalms 149:4... Then, should not they take pleasure in him? If he looks upon them with divine delight, should not they look up to him with adoring gratitude? What is there in us to give him any pleasure? But if his delights are with the sons of men, surely the sons of men should have their delights in him: “For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people.”

Psalms 149:4-5... Let them glory in God, and be joyful in him. Let their spirits seem to rise even beyond grace up to the anticipation of glory: “Let the saints be joyful in glory.”

Psalms 149:5... If they be sick, or if they lie awake at night, or if they have enjoyed sweet rest, let them not fail to praise God for it: “Let them sing aloud upon their beds.”

Psalms 149:6... But let it be a spiritual sword, that two-edged sword of God’s Word which will cut through coats of mail; and as they wield it, let them ever rest satisfied that victory shall surely be theirs.

Psalms 149:7... So they had to do in those old times: but we, happily, have not to do so now, except it be in a spiritual sense that, with the sword of God’s Word we are to cut down the idols of the heathen, and subdue the nations to our King.

Psalms 149:8... Reading the passage in a gospel sense, we lead men captives in the bonds of love that are stronger than fetters of iron. O soldiers of Christ, army of the living God, this is the battle you have to fight; be this your victory, too!

Psalms 149:9... So the Psalm ends upon its key-note, — “Hallelujah.” “Praise ye the Lord.’ Now let us turn to the 5th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, and see what we have to rejoice in there...”

- <https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/spe/psalms-149.html> Charles H. Spurgeon's Verse Expositions of the Bible

1 John 3:1-3; RCL, Revelation 21:1-6a (Hebrews 9:24-28; RCL, the same reading)

“...In the Roman world adoptions took place, but it was not about compassion for orphans. In fact, many people were adopted as young adults or adults. Adoption was about inheritance and name. Often a man was adopted to carry on the name of a childless family. The adopted son would sever ties to the old family and this would include relief of any debt owed under the name of the old family. He would become a whole new person, in a new context, with a new inheritance and name...”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2430 **Nijay Gupta** Assistant Professor of New Testament, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Portland, Ore.

3 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears^[a] we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

a. [1 John 3:2](#) *Or when it appears*

“...The closing lines of chapter 2 reminded the readers of Jesus' expected return, and called for a life of righteousness that will allow "boldness" when he comes.

The first two verses of chapter 3 root this confident hope in what God has already done. The text begins where we must always begin, with the love of God given to us.

The content of that love (or perhaps its result) is that we are called "God's children". This is not just wishing or pretending; we are what God declares us to be. The implicit imagery here is one of adoption. God lovingly calls us God's children, and that declaration makes it so. We are God's children not by our choice or by our accomplishment, but by the Father's love.

One might reasonably conclude that being God's children must be the ultimate goal; after all, what could be better? However, verse 2 points ahead to a greater, still unrealized fulfillment. The fullness of what it means to be God's children will be revealed only at the apocalyptic appearing. But it is not as though we have no idea what God has in mind. Jesus himself is our future, and God intends to transform us to be like the Son.

There is no other pattern or goal than Jesus himself. The good news is not that Jesus helps us to be "more ____", with the blank filled by whatever value, virtue, or ideal we choose to adopt. Rather, the good news is that Jesus himself *is* the goal and the gift. Jesus is not only the shape of God's past love toward us through incarnation, cross, and resurrection; Jesus is also the shape of God's final gracious gift: to conform our lives to God's perfect love in the Son...”

- http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1286 [Brian Peterson](#) Professor of New Testament, Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, Columbia, SC

When this reading occurred on Easter 3 of this year (April 9), it included verses 4-7. The following commentary includes those verses.

“It keeps coming up like a bad burp. So much of 1 John is lyric. Few passages talk better about the meaning of love than ones you can find in John’s first epistle. The opening verses of this third chapter likewise are simply gorgeous, waxing eloquent on the love lavished on us by God our Father and how this makes us children of God. This is wonderful prose, almost poetic actually. And in so many ways it encapsulates the essence of what makes the Gospel the amazing Good News it is.

And yet . . . no sooner does John say this and he feels compelled to loop back to another sub-theme in this letter: sin. It’s pretty obvious that whatever was going on among the people to whom John addressed this letter, something had gone wrong in their attitudes

toward sin. We got this message in also last week's selection from the opening chapter and now here it is again, coming almost as a seemingly unwelcome intrusion to the lyric words about the lavish love of God and being children of God and all that.

"You are children of God! You live in him and so are pure! And, oh, by the way: if you keep sinning you are no friend of God!!" As in the opening chapter (and just into chapter 2) that we looked at last week, so here: John is no idealist. It's not as though he expects anyone (himself included one would presume) to exist as blameless or sinless this side of glory or of the full in-breaking of God's kingdom. But again and again here it is the "keeps on sinning" idea that bothers John the most and that we can surmise must have taken some kind of a foothold in the communities to whom John is writing...

In this Eastertide, we encounter the apostle John here saying pretty much the same things. You cannot be casual about sin, you cannot willfully wallow in sin, you cannot just let things slide in your life and still think you are in Christ. To do so shows merely that you don't "get it." Actually, it's worse than that. It's one thing to get confused in math class. You just cannot see the relationships among the numbers to make sense of a certain proof or algorithm. You don't get it. You might "get" other facets of math, but not this one.

But to keep on sinning, John says, is not just a little error. It's not a side part of the faith you don't get like just not seeing how one facet of mathematics functions. No, in this case you are missing the whole thing. You cannot be just a little bit wrong on this point and still be in Christ. It's kind of all or nothing on this one.

Grace saves but if you really received it, grace transforms. Inevitably. So if you keep abusing people, keep hurting people, keep hating people, keep committing adultery or stealing or lying or any number of things and have no desire either to stop such activity much less confess it as wrong, well then, that's not a mistake. It's a different world altogether that has nothing to do with being children of the heavenly Father. The Lectionary cuts off this reading rather unnaturally at verse 7, probably to avoid all that scary (and unmodern) talk about the Devil and being children of the Devil. Oooh, that seems over the top.

But it's not. It's actually a logical follow-through and it was meant then—and is meant now—to shake us up to wonder whom we are really serving in how we live. In short, you don't get to enjoy the lyric and lovely truths in the first few verses of this reading if that does not result in an entirely new quality of life for you every day and in every way. This is not an easy message, and it probably will seem frightening mostly to people who have already been transformed and want nothing to do with such behavior. But you never know: John hopes he can still crack through to those who are still outside Christ (though they may try to fool themselves otherwise).

So you keep putting the gorgeous and lyric truths out there for all to see in the hope that the day will come when you will not have to follow that up all the time with warnings about all this other unhappy stuff!...

What we want in preaching is what John wanted in proclaiming the lavish love of the Father for us his children: we want to present the Good News in so lyric and compelling a way that others will want it, too."

- http://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/easter-3b-2/?type=lectionary_epistle
Scott Hoezee

Matthew 5:1-12; RCL, John 11:32-44 (Mark 12:38-44; RCL, the same reading)

“There is a trap hidden in the Beatitudes that I know I have fallen into countless times, and perhaps you have, too. The trap is as simple as it is subtle: believing that Jesus is setting up the conditions of blessing, rather than actually blessing his hearers...” (continued after the reading)

The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew the 5th Chapter”

The Sermon on the Mount

5 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

The Beatitudes

² And he opened his mouth 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 shall be comforted.*

⁵ *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*

⁶ *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*

⁷ *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.*

⁸ *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

⁹ *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons^[a] of God.*

¹⁰ *“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

¹¹ *“Blessed are you when others 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 so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

- a. [Matthew 5:9](#) Greek *huios*; see Preface

“This is the Gospel of the Lord” “Praise to You, O Christ”

“Do you know what I mean? When I hear the Beatitudes, it's hard for me not to hear Jesus as stating the terms under which I might be blessed. For instance, when I hear "Blessed are the pure in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," I tend to think, "Am I pure enough in spirit?" or "I should try to be more pure in spirit." Or, when I hear "blessed are the peacemakers...," I think, "Yes, I really should be more committed to making peace." At least with "blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted," I have the assurance of knowing that on those occasions when I am mourning I will be comforted. But, to be perfectly honest -- and if you'll pardon the pun -- that's relatively small comfort because the truth is I

don't want to mourn, and hearing this beatitude doesn't make me any more eager for additional mourning. (Ditto for being persecuted!)

But let's be clear -- or at least pay attention to the fact that Matthew is quite clear -- Jesus isn't set up conditions or terms but rather is just plain blessing people. All kinds of people. All kinds of down-and-out, extremely vulnerable, and at the bottom of the ladder people. Why? To proclaim that God regularly shows up in mercy and blessing just where you least expect God to be -- with the poor rather than the rich, those who are mourning rather than celebrating, the meek and the peacemakers rather than the strong and victorious. This is not where citizens of the ancient world look for God and, quite frankly, it's not where citizens of our own world do either. If God shows up here, Jesus is saying, blessing the weak and the vulnerable, then God will be everywhere, showering all creation and its inhabitants with blessing.

When I was in graduate school, one of my teachers, Dr. Cleophus LaRue, would regularly address me as "Dr. Lose." Eventually it made me uncomfortable enough that I said to him, "But Dr. LaRue, I haven't earned my doctorate yet. I don't think you should call me that." "Dr. Lose," he patiently responded, "in the African-American church we are not content to call you what you are, but instead call you what we believe you will be!" Blessing. Unexpected, unsettling, nearly inconceivable, yet blessing nonetheless.

So here's the question I am left with this week, Working Preacher: What would it be like just to bless the congregation. To tell them that God loves and adores them, that God wants the very best for them, that God esteems them worthy of not just God's attention but God's blessing. You may have to say it a couple of times, as we're either so used to hearing the words that we don't really listen or so convinced that we don't merit God's blessing that we have a hard time believing it.

In fact, perhaps we shouldn't just talk about God's blessing but actually enact it. It could be that we decide to have persons come up to be individually blessed. Or that we conclude the sermon with a remembrance of baptism and the blessing baptism signifies. Or perhaps we could have people share with each other where they have recently experienced God's blessing. Or maybe have folks turn to another to hear and receive God's blessing. Whatever we do, we need to think hard about how to help people hear and believe that they are blessed because, as Dr. LaRue knew, we become what we are called, and calling our people blessed will over time transform them to be God's blessing in and to the world."

➤ <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=1542> David Lose

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"Well, I am standing before you in the customary place of a preacher. I am in the process of saying something—hopefully worth hearing. But knowing when to stop? That is always a challenge for preachers and particularly when the text is the Beatitudes. Each verse is as densely packed with meaning as a hunk of cheesecake is with calories. Luther writes 47 pages on the Beatitudes in one place alone. A preacher could go on for a long time....

The Beatitudes are like a fine painting. You can appreciate them by coming in close and focusing on one small piece. Like noticing the texture, color, and brush strokes of a single flower in Monet's Water Lilies you can ponder one verse deep and long. But you can also back up appreciate a painting's impact as a whole. In the same way you can reflect on how the individual verses, taken together, contribute to a unified vision. That's what I want to do this

morning, to think about what the Beatitudes as a whole tell us about the future God desires for us and our world, a world characterized by simplicity, compassion, and hopefulness.

Before I go any further I want you to notice something about the Beatitudes. They are indicatives rather than imperatives. You'll remember from your high school English class that indicatives make statements, "This is a dog." Imperatives make commands, "Stop right there." Most of the time we hear the Beatitudes as imperatives, as Jesus commanding us to do certain things: Be poor in spirit. Be pure in heart. Be meek.

The problem with hearing these words as imperatives is that one, it's hard to command someone to be pure or meek; two, the commands may seem so impossible that we give up before we even start. We can even assume that since the demands are so daunting that they can not apply to us. Indeed, in the middle ages the Beatitudes, interpreted as commands, were often seen as applicable primarily to monks who wanted to attain a super-Christian status unavailable to mere mortals.

To be sure Jesus hopes that these words will have an impact on how we live, but first he's inviting us to see how the world can be different if we see it through God's eyes. "This is the way it can be," says Jesus, "this is the way it is when we let go of old ways of seeing the world and live as God desires. The difference between seeing these verses as exhortation and proclamation is the difference between saying, "Treat your bratty brother better" and suggesting, "When you treat your bratty brother with kindness, it's better for both you and him." ..."

➤ www.lmlc.org/sermon-texts/attachments/Simplicity_Compassiion_Hopefulness.doc



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