

The Festival of All Saints – November 1-2, 2008
St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA
Rev. John S. Meehan

Matthew 5:1-12

"Saintly Stewardship"

Part 1 in a four-part Series on Christian Stewardship

Today, I have people on my mind. I am thinking about those saints among us who have been called to their eternal home during this past year, and the impact they have had on my life as an individual, and on our life together as a congregation. Many of these people, long-time members of St. John's, I have known for twenty years. Today, I am thinking about Jim, Carl, Will, Ed, Aileen, Polly, Margery, John, and Jim. I am not only thinking about them, remembering them, but also giving thanks to God for them - for their life and witness, for the blessing they have been to me, and to all of us, in our journey of faith as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ who is risen from the dead, who lives and reigns to all eternity. You see, we worship a living Lord, who himself died, but is now alive forevermore, and that changes everything. That living Lord gives us hope in time of loss, sustains us when we are downcast and discouraged, strengthens us when we are weak and weary. Those saints who have died in the Lord, whom we remember especially today on this All Saints Sunday, still belong to that living Lord, and so we are his in life and in death. On this All Saints Sunday, the message for today rises up out of the Gospel lesson appointed for today, a portion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12).

I believe when Jesus first spoke the words found in today's Gospel lesson, he also had people on his mind. He names these various people on his mind - the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, those who are reviled and persecuted falsely on account of Jesus. And without exception, he pronounces all of them "blessed." Jesus' definition of what it means to be blessed stands in stark contrast with the world's definition. From Jesus' perspective, to be blessed is not about material goods, wealth, power, or influence. So often, that is how the world defines "blessed," and in truth, that is how many believers think of it - a better job, a bigger house, a nicer car. We think that God must love us very much when these things come our way. Conversely, when these material things are not present or are removed from our lives, we think that God is punishing us. But what do the Scriptures say? Are we equating the kingdom of God with the kingdom of this world when it comes to being blessed?

On this Festival of All Saints, we begin a 4-part series on Christian stewardship. A definition for Christian stewardship is provided in the introductory paragraphs in today's service bulletin, and that is this: **"Christian stewardship is the free and joyous activity of the child of God and God's family, the church, in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes."** Saintly stewardship begins with the truth that we own nothing. God is the Maker and Owner of heaven and earth (see Psalm 24:1); we are merely the caretakers, the managers, of what belongs to God - and it all belongs to God! Earth and all its resources, ourselves, our time, our possessions - it all belongs to

God and is merely on loan to us for a time. The question I'd like each one of us to consider is who are those saints in our lives who have taught us, shown us, modeled for us what Christian stewardship means? Who has helped us to understand and live out that free and joyous activity of managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes? If that person is now numbered among the Church Triumphant in heaven, then offer a prayer of thanks to God. If that person is still among the Church Militant here on earth, then offer a prayer of thanks to God, and express your thanks and appreciation to that person, for they have given you a tremendous gift. This gift is meant to be shared and passed on to the next generation. So, how are we doing as God's saints in managing God's gifts, modeling for others that free and joyous activity in managing all of life and life's resources for God's purposes ?

To be blessed as Jesus defines it and as it is revealed in holy Scripture leads us to another "B" word. This word comes to us in today's second Scripture reading (1 John 3:1-3). Please turn to this lesson in your worship bulletin. Can you find it? It is that word "Beloved." Verse 2 in the lessons tells us: "**Beloved, we are God's children now.**" When we know and believe and trust that we are God's beloved, his dearly loved children, so precious and valuable in his sight that he would not spare even the life of his only Son for our sake, then we are truly blessed. When, in response to God's redeeming mercy and grace in Jesus Christ, we gladly and willingly conform our lives to his will and purpose, then we are truly blessed. When we experience disappointment and failure, when we endure pain and suffering, but also by faith see in these experiences how the love of the Lord is not diminished or weakened, then we are truly blessed. When our outward circumstances decline and the economic picture appears bleak, but faith in God's power to help in time of need perseveres, then we are truly blessed. To be blessed is to entrust all that we are and have into God's hands for safekeeping since as God's beloved, we have "**washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb**" (Revelation 7:14). Jesus is that Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world - your sin and mine. And that same Lamb is also the Shepherd of his saints, who "**guides them to springs of the water of life**" (Revelation 7:17). Because we are God's beloved for Jesus' sake, we are truly blessed.

Maybe you have people on your mind today, too. The truth is that the Lord God always has people on his mind - you, me, and people everywhere. As God's saints, we are living in some very challenging times right now - economic uncertainty, a pivotal presidential election this week, global challenges. It would be easy to go into hiding, but saintly stewardship calls us to manage all of life and life's resources for God's purposes - not begrudgingly or fearfully, but freely and joyfully. May God help us, who are his beloved saints, to do this very thing, and we will be blessed. May God make it so for Jesus' sake. Amen.