

The River of God

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*All Saints
Matthew 5:1-12*

Every Sunday is Easter Sunday. Every Sunday is a celebration of Jesus' rising from the grave. His proclamation by act. Jesus' rising *is* the expansive superabundance of God's love overcoming the powers of death.

Every Sunday is Easter Sunday. But some Sundays are more Sunday-e-ier. And this Sunday -- All Saints -- is such a Sunday. It is a high feast day. A great celebration. A day when we baptize. A day when we try to pack our very best into one service. Our best music, our most solemn prayers, our most sacred teachings.

For instance, today we remember and recommit to Jesus' first sermon, the great sermon on the mount. Jesus ascends a large rise in the earth and a crowd gathers to listen. This sermon follows Jesus' own baptism in the river Jordan by John. Our prayer book mirrors the bible in this way. Matthew couples baptism with commitment. Jesus' sermon on the mount helps tell us what his baptism means. What kind of life God has called him to. Our service of baptism attempts to do the same.

Consider this modern-esque icon by Jerzy Nowosielski.

Jerzy represents the Trinity in three red dots. The first haloed around Jesus. God in human form. The second -- the Spirit -- descending and resting in the river itself. And the last, God the Father, half seen, hovering above all.

We baptize on All Saints to remember this River. Jesus floats in it. Is tightly wrapped together. As if prepared for burial. John's hand is caught halfway between the Spirit and the Incarnate Holy One. Pulling him into the Divine life.

The River is our journey of faith. It beckons the man and woman who look and gesture to it. As it beckons all people. Slip into the River of God. Notice how little separates the River from everything else. The banks of the River Jordan are very thin indeed. The whole picture flows and swirls together. We are all enclosed by it.

Reflecting on the Philippians Hymn -- that Jesus was in the form of God but emptied himself into creation as a fleshly gift of compassion -- Gregory of Nyssa suggests that Jesus poured himself into the world like a pitcher of water that never ends. A pitcher that fills all things (1 Cor. 13: 7).

Today Jesus reminds us who we are.

It is too easy to forget that the church is not for those who have everything figured out. Not the exclusive domain for the well mannered or rich. The church is for the ship wrecked. A hospital for those who have washed-up onto the altar of God.

Echoing the image of the Good shepherd, Jesus tell us,

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

These are our saints. They always have been, are still, and will continue forever to be. Jesus does not call on us to save these people. Salvation is already theirs. It is by drawing near to them, seeing in ourselves the mourning heart of God that we will be saved.

The church has often failed in this message. Failed in this kind of inclusion. And so we set aside days like today to say to each and every one of you. You are welcome here. Do you feel lost? Angry? Sacred? Are you mourning the death of a loved one? Can you make no sense of all this God talk? We need you. Your gifts, your talents, your insecurities. All of it is part of the salvation story of God.

In our baptism we commit to proclaiming this gospel message; to resisting evil; to loving all people; and to respecting the dignity of every human being.

Some have taken the sermon on the mount to endorse a kind of faith that is a mere personal piety, a private and individualistic conception of faith -- *Blessed are the pure in heart*, they emphasize. But Jesus is quite clear about the kind of life we are to lead.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

And perhaps most difficult-ly Jesus warns us what kind of life this life of radical grace and inclusion will come to.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you ...

... Rejoice and be glad, Jesus says. It's this kind of talk that leads me to think that Jesus would have made a terrible salesman. And it's this kind of talk that has led any number of pastors to warn their fellow saints before jumping into the Jordan River.

That the eternal waters of that River enclose us and protect us; that they surround us in God's never ending love and mercy -- these truths do not allow us to retreat from resisting and challenging that chaotic world defined by its idolization of power and violence.

This All Saints -- *All Saints 2020* -- comes just days before a presidential election held in the midst of a global pandemic. There is much on the line this next week and everyone of us should be compelled to vote. And none of this -- these themes of 2020 -- are lost on today's Gospel.

Jesus calling us to stand fast in the face of discrimination. Jesus venerating those who mourn. Jesus calling us to be merciful with ourselves as our hearts often fill with anxiety and pain. -- One wonders if a single day has passed since Jesus stood on that mount.

In a moment I will cede the floor to Rosa as she provides space for us to center and let the Spirit swell within us. Then Amy will ask you to renew your baptismal vows. Might I suggest that as you respond you gently hold the hands of those you are watching with. And if you're watching alone, to let your hand fall over your heart.

We are the Body of Christ. We float down the River Jordan together. Bound by our promises to God. God will be with us on this journey. No matter what happens we are already in the ocean that is the love of God. God will hold us when we are weak. Will lift our eyes to see the joy and beauty that surround us. The birth waters that bore you, hold you eternally, and to them we will all return. I end with this benediction. This fulsome description of the saints of God.

Blessed are the misunderstood.

Blessed are my friends who give me another chance when I don't deserve it.

Blessed are the children who laugh when everyone else wants to.

Blessed are the civil.

Blessed are those who listen twice.

Blessed are the traumatized.

Blessed are the felons.

Blessed are those who turn over rock and after rock looking for peace.

Blessed are the depressed.

Blessed are those marching for justice.

Blessed are those who beg.

Blessed are the failures.

Blessed is that guy who didn't flip me off even though I almost backed into his car.

Blessed are those who sing.

Blessed are those full of doubt.

Blessed are these children of God, for in them God will be seen. Amen.

