

Daniel 7:1-3,15-18

Psalm 149

Ephesians 1:11-23

Luke 6:20-31

While I was trying to figure out what I might like to say today about All Saints Day, my friend Holli died. For 2 ½ years her friends and acquaintances have been following her misadventures on her journey of battling cancer through her Facebook posts. She was incredibly quick-witted and could come up with the pithiest of comments about her experiences that made all of us laugh. She was filled with faith and grace in the midst of a nightmare experience. There was never a hint of self-pity, but there was an abundance or wonder in life; and gratitude for everything and everyone around her. She was an inspiration to all of us.

She was 48 years old. She leaves behind a husband, a teenage daughter and a teenage son.

She leaves behind..... So many of us know what that feels like.....to be left behind. So many of us have been thrown into the midst of grief when we have been left behind. We know what mourning is like. It's a physical aching for the physical presence of one who is no longer here. It is an emotional roller coaster without a visible track. We don't know when the ride will end. We only know that we can't get off. We're stuck for the duration. And we can't turn back time and we can't change the outcome. Life is now different. Life will never again be the same.

No one knows better than Jesus that life will never again be the same. That was the whole point of his joining us here on earth.....so that we might know that *this* is not all there is to life! Jesus came to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God: to proclaim good news to the poor and to proclaim the year of the Lord's Jubilee.....when all debts were forgiven. That's Jesus' mission.....then and now.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the Communion of Saints. We are gathered together to remind ourselves and each other that *this* life isn't all the life

there is. We are bound together....now and forever..... with all of those who have gone before us. All of those who, like Holli, are now on the other side of the veil. What we tend to lose sight of from time to time is that eternal life begins in *this* life. It begins in our desire and our willingness and our efforts and our longing to help realize....even if only in a small way.....the kingdom of God in *this* life. All of us get snapshots of that world from time to time.....each one being a heavenly reminder of what awaits us.

In our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus talks to us about two worlds.....the one we live in on earth and the world that is God's kingdom. He encourages those who are struggling in this world by telling them that all their needs will be met in the next. And he warns those who are comfortable in this life about their obligation to help usher in the kingdom of God in this world.....in the here and now. He gives us a mandate of what he wants us to do.....a mandate that we know we need because we know that we are broken people living in a broken world. The world we live in now....particularly here in the United States for the last several months of the current election cycle.....has been a world filled with vitriolic rhetoric and anxiety producing scenarios that have taken an emotional and psychological and spiritual toll on all of us. As the election gets closer, we are more and more aware of the anxiety and angst that it has created and our worries about what will follow when the election is over. Our country is involved in a peculiar struggle of trying to decide who we are. Relationships have been strained. Families have been divided and some hearts have been broken. In the aftermath of the election, we will need to seek ways of healing and reconciliation. We will need to seek ways of unifying all of us into one nation. It will be as important as it has ever been for all of us as followers of Jesus Christ to do our utmost to following the mandate that Jesus has provided for us.

Here's the mandate from Jesus:

**Love your enemies** – really? There are some people in my private life that I would consider enemies and some people in public life that I might put into that same category. These are people that I know don't like me. And to be quite honest, I don't much like them either. Everyone here probably has some folks in their life that fall into that category. And yet, Jesus is asking us to *love* them. He didn't say, "Be polite" or "Be tolerant" or "just stay out of their way." What he says to us is: "Love them." Without prayer and support.....how could any of us do that? But we

know that Jesus answers our prayers. We know that Jesus gives us strength when there is none. And we know that Jesus can change us.....can change *our* hearts if we but ask.

**Do good to those who hate you** – we can't just stand back; Jesus charges us to take action.....positive action and to do good things for people that we know hate us.

**Bless those who curse you** – don't respond in kind. It's so instinctive to us to want to hit back.....verbally, if not literally. But that isn't what we are asked to do. And he doesn't tell us to turn our backs on people who curse us. We are asked to bless the very people who are cursing us.....and not in a sarcastic way, but in a genuine and authentic way. Again, prayer is the answer for this. We cannot begin to be able to do this on our own.

**Pray for those who abuse you** – lift them up in prayer to God---not by asking that God will strike them down, but by asking that God's peace will descend on them—that God will open their eyes and soften their hearts. But if it is at all possible, remove yourself from the line of fire even as you pray for their well-being

**If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also** – this sounds like a position of weakness, but it is not; this is so very counter-intuitive as we all want to protect ourselves and we do it instinctively. There is also within us a desire to want to strike back, but refusing to be provoked into physical aggression is such a powerful statement of strength. It is the equivalent of standing firm against evil.

**And if anyone takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt** – please, Jesus, are you kidding? This definitely goes against the grain; if you've ever had anything stolen from you, you know what an insult it is....what an affront it is..... what an assault it is. You know how infuriating and unfair it is and how anger producing it is, but here is Jesus telling us to give our shirts as well. How much we need prayer to help us do this!

**Give to everyone who begs from you** – that means Jesus wants us to give something to the folks who approach us at the stoplight and the folks who walk

up to us in the shopping center and the folks who come to the church door wanting money for their rent or their electric bill or their cell phone.

**If anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again** – Jesus instructs us to let them be----when someone borrows something from us or takes something from us, we aren't supposed to ask for it back. Decidedly counterintuitive.

And the last instruction: **Do to others as you would have them do to you** – this is also known as the Golden Rule, but let's not get it mixed up. It doesn't say, "Do to others as they do to you!" It says exactly the opposite. Think of how you would like to be treated; how you would like to be judged; how you would like to be included in a group; how you would like things to be said about you behind your back; how you would like to be appreciated; how you would like to be praised; how you would like to be celebrated; how you would like to be remembered; how you would like to be complimented. These are all the ways that Jesus is telling us we should behave with others.....regardless of how they behave with us.

No one said it was going to be easy to be a Christian. And certainly it isn't. What Jesus asks us to do is challenging and difficult, but it's important. These are the guidelines for how we are to practice Christianity. These are the things Jesus is asking us to do in addition to worshipping God and in addition to remembering him. We can practice these things right here.....in this body of Christ in Bailey's Crossroads. These are the things he wants us to do to be his hands and feet not only with each other but out in the world.....perhaps with people who don't know him. These are the things he asks us to do to shine his light for others.

Not only do we need his strength through the prayers we lift up to him, but we also come to this Holy Table to celebrate the remembrance of him. We come not only to be pardoned but also to be replenished with his most blessed body and blood. When you open your hands at the rail today, fill them with all the burdens that you carry.....all the worries and anxieties that you have.....all the heartbreak that you endure.....and give all these things to him as you receive him into yourselves.

None of us can accomplish Jesus' mandate on our own. We are all as fatally flawed as were the saints that we celebrate today on both sides of the veil. The saints we celebrate today.....both the famous and the unknown.....the ancient

and the contemporary and all the ones in between.....are sinners redeemed by the love of God. The communion of saints that we celebrate today is made up of those redeemed by the love of God through Jesus Christ.....and they are on both sides of the veil. Because of the greatest gift we've ever received, the triumph over death of Jesus Christ, we have the promise and the hope of the resurrection and the promise and the hope of reunion with those we love who have gone before us.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.