

All Saints Sermon 2020- Matthew 5:1-12

What do you call a group of lions? (A pride of lions.)

What do you call a group of geese? (A gaggle of geese.)

What do you call a group of gnats? (A cloud of gnats.)

- Some groups of animals were named according to how humans used them (a yoke of oxen, a team of horses).
- Some of the groups were named for their characteristics (a brood of hens, a thunder of hippopotamus, a leap of leopards).
- These nouns have extended to groups of people too:
- What do you call a group of directors of an organization? A board. (Named for what they called the table where the council was being held.)
- How about a group of musicians? A band. (originally musical groups were affiliated with the military which wore a band of cloth on their arms to identify themselves: a band of soldiers, a band of musicians...)
- So today is All Saints Sunday. So here's one more for you: What do you call a group of saints?
- ...A communion.
- The phrase "communion of saints" first turned up around the 5th century in a version of our oldest creed, the Apostle's creed:
- I believe in the Holy Spirit The holy catholic church The communion of saints
The forgiveness of sins The resurrection of the body The life everlasting
- A communion of saints.
- The word communion in our Christian tradition also known as "koinonia" refers to the spiritual practice of community.

- When I was a little girl when we celebrated communion at church, I would go up with my family and kneel at the communion rail on these plush red velvet cushions.
- And I'd wait there for the pastor and communion assistants to hand out bread and blessings and tiny cups of juice.
- The communion rail was this curved semicircle in front of the altar table.
- It was many years later when I learned that these curved communion rails around the front of an altar were thought to be completed by this invisible second semi-circle around the back of the table where All The Saints that had gone before us also communed with us.
- So in this sense, the communion table, I learned, is this big, wide, crowded table full of saints and sinners and ancestors and decedents,
- including all of those names that we just read earlier, together with all of us—
- all crowded together around the table with our stories and joys, and struggles and griefs.
- It is a beautiful image: that crowded table full of all us jostling to see and share and listen.
- If only the practice of communing together were so simple.
- There's an episcopal church in San Francisco (St. Gregory of Nyssa) that has a gorgeous piece of art that wraps around the rotunda of sanctuary.
- It was completed by artist Mark Dukes about ten years ago.
- At the middle, there's this dancing Jesus and all around him there's all these saints—some of the saints are predictable:

- You've got your King David, and St. Theresa of Avalon, and St. Francis of Assisi.
- And then, they have some edgier, modern saints up there too.
- There are saints that some of us will embrace, and saints that others of us will wrestle with: There's Malcom X, Anne Frank, and Margaret Mead to name a few.
- This image reminds me that we're a communion of saints.
- And there's something about being a communion that isn't quite in step with every day culture.
- Think about it: In the communion, we're called to compassion and justice— not because it's will earn us a ticket into heaven
- but because compassion and justice are characteristics of Jesus.
- As today's reading reminds us: We are called to bless, bless those who mourn, bless the merciful, bless those who hunger.
- And.. Worship is a time when we come to bless, and be blessed.
- We worship for a lot of reasons.
- One reason we worship is because here, we practice how to live outside of the church's walls.
- A concept we are learning more and more about in these recent months.
- When we share the peace in worship: normally we shake hands, We hug. Even now as it looks a bit different... we still pass the peace... the deeply needed peace.... We still practice reconciliation.
- And that is we have come to realize still needs to happen, regardless of where church happens.
- In worship, we also confess our sin and our imperfection together.

- Again, that is what we need to be doing outside of these walls: talking about our vulnerabilities and challenges in our daily lives.
- And finally in worship...
- We eat at the table together as the communion of saints.
- Because—let's be honest--usually, we're going to hand pick who is at our dinner table these days... and we don't normally eat with the whole St. Mark family,
- But we're called to still do it!
- This communion of saints, this call to community (all of us here in relationship together),
- by the power of the Holy Spirit, it has power to turn the world upside down.
- And while the communion of saints is so much more than our little congregation, we practice the communion of saints not only here, but at our tables at home!
- We are a communion of SAINTS being knit together, red, blue, green, sparkly gold.
- we are anxious and overworked,we are addicted, we are straight-shooters and hopeful,
- and shy, uncomfortable in our own skin,
- We are grieving and heartbroken.
- We are task oriented and courageous.
- We are stressed out.
- We are fearful and people pleasers
- We are visionaries.
- We are people who do life together.

- We are blessed.
- We are the church.
- And each week, we come together as a communion of saints.
- Whether inside this place, inside our homes, on computer or TV screens.
- And sometimes, communion itself is clumsy and a little wine gets spilled.
- And sometimes we mess up the words.
- And sometimes we're comforted
- And sometimes we're angry.
- And sometimes, we cry during a hymn, a prayer, or something we heard from our week.
- Because we are a communion of saints, that is what it means to do life together.
- All of us crowd around our communion tables in the name of Jesus Christ who sets us free and promises us life everlasting in him;
- and we do our best to follow him, sometimes failing, sometimes succeeding.
- Sometimes we have no idea where the God is in our lives right now
- but we show up anyway,
- and admit we're lost or tired or broken
- and strive to understand one another, bound together by God!
- So, join me at the table, sinners, saints, cynics, seekers,
- burdened and healed,
- "surrounded by such great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us
- Come to the table.

- Let us celebrate the saints
- The communion of saints.
- Amen