



## November 2 – All the Saints

When I received word that my brother Jason had died, this helpless feeling consumed me. I sat on the couch on the main floor by myself for what felt like hours. It was probably only 10 minutes or so. I sat there, somewhere between tears and anger. I felt helpless because I didn't want to be alone but could not summon the words to break out of the silence. What do you say? So, I sat there until I had the courage to send a simple text, fingers shaking at the thought turned real as I wrote the words, "Jason is gone."

What was weird was that no more than I finished writing the words when the anger ceased and the tears burst forth. There was a feeling of liberation in giving myself permission to feel all the feelings. Then, I was an absolute mess as my wife came down the stairs. I did not care. There was no desire to push back the pain that had just been named. A pain that was a year in the making as he slowly caved to the realities of mental illness. I had voiced the reality. It no longer had power over me.

When we look at texts like the beatitudes, there is often a temptation to spiritualize them. It is easier to think of it that way. Even the Gospel according to St. Matthew softens the start by adding "poor in spirit." Some have even written books calling them something else, like the "Happy Attitudes." When we spiritualize these sayings, it drives us to create a reason for everything that happens. We tell ourselves things like, "This was God's plan, and if I wait long enough, good will come out of this."

Jesus is speaking truth. As he goes through these sayings with the disciples, he is naming their reality. They are under the thumb of Rome. Life is difficult. They are reviled because they are followers of Jesus. Following Jesus is not easy. Jesus names these facts. In naming them, they lose some of their power over those who hear these words.

The late Rev. Dr. Walter Brueggemann spoke of the Church having three prophetic tasks. 1. Tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion. 2. Tell the truth in a society that practices denial. 3. Grieve in a society that practices denial. I believe this is what Jesus was doing as he was teaching his disciples. As we gather today, on All Saints' Sunday, may we find strength in knowing that we are part of a continuum of saints through the whole of time. The saints before us have lived through similar times. The saints after us will learn from how we lived.

If we are to speak truth, we find we are far more similar to the context in Jesus' time than we would like to admit. Inflation is driving up the costs of everything. We no longer have leaders who represent us. There are two parties who fight with one another and draw us into the battle. We have been manipulated into fighting with one another. I do not know of anyone who looks at the State or Federal government and feels it is functioning well and truly has the best interest of we the people in mind. Yet, we are trained to believe there is an enemy in our own neighborhoods, someone who dares think differently than I do. That is an illusion. We want many of the same things, if we would be willing to let go of "being right" and enter honest discussion with one another.

I pray that as we name the hurts that we are facing, we may also move from denial into grief. We live in a society that is not comfortable with grief. I sometimes wonder if that is connected by our collective reluctance to admit how much we care. That is what grief is. It is a reminder of the love that was shared. If you did not care about someone or something, you would not grieve. May we lean into our love of others, those who have gone before us, and also our love for one another. May we grieve that we are losing our way as a country. May we have the courage to build a different future.

That should give us hope. We need not be in despair. Today is All Saints' Sunday, which is a reminder that no matter what we are facing, whether joy, despair, or anything in between, it does not last. We learn from those who have gone before us. We pick up the baton and continue the work. In all of this, we have hope upon hope knowing that God walks with us. May we never lose sight of hope. Amen.

Pastor Michael Schmidt