

Rev. Paula Jefferson  
All Saints' Day  
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## Blessed are the Cheese Makers!

As young person, I remember playing a game where we sat in chairs in a circle. The leader handed an index card to the first player. On the card was a simple, short sentence...like, Sally is going to have a baby today while Mark is at home making a pumpkin pie.

After reading the index card, you gave it back to the leader. Then you turned to the person on your right and whispered the sentence into that person's ear. Each person, in turn, heard a sentence in the left ear and repeated what they thought they heard to the next person.

Of course, by the time the last person hears the sentence and tells the group what was heard, it is a far stretch from the original sentence.

In 1979, Monty Python's movie, "Life of Brian" was released. The story is about Brian, a baby born the same night as Jesus, in a different manger. In the movie, Brian's story intersects with Jesus at the point of the Sermon on the Mount...today's Gospel reading. Crowds are following Jesus to hear him teach. Jesus is leading them through a desert and up a sandy hill. As he walks, the crowd grows larger and larger.

When Jesus begins teaching, the camera and sound are close to him. He begins: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven". With each beatitude, the camera and audio move toward *the edges of the crowd*, where Brian is standing. But Brian is too far away, Jesus' message can't be heard over the crowd. So folks close to Jesus are repeating what he said to people behind them, and then the message is again repeated, and again.

By the time the message gets to Brian, “Blessed are the Peacemakers” has become “Blessed are the Cheesemakers”.

Monty Python’s presentation of the sermon on the mount could not be further from the description in Matthew’s Gospel.

According to Matthew, when Jesus sees the crowds, he goes the other way...climbing to a high place. This is the setting where God reveals God’s self to Moses, Elijah, the disciples, and us. Jesus sits down, taking the posture of Jewish teachers---and the disciples...*not crowds*...gather around him.

This is an intimate gathering...like a living room, fireplace ablaze, cat purring contentedly, and friends gathered to listen and learn.

It’s important, I think, to remember that Jesus has only recently called these disciples. In Matthew’s 4<sup>th</sup> chapter, Jesus calls Peter, Andrew, James, and John. The 5<sup>th</sup> chapter opens with the sermon on the mount. This is Jesus’ first recorded teaching to his disciples.

He doesn’t start by laying out a mission statement or vision statement. There’s no mention of the budget, the plans for expansion. He doesn’t offer them a campaign slogan or a baseball cap for Team Yahweh.

***Instead, Jesus reveals his compassion and love for the humans gathered around him. He knows the cost of following him. He already loves those who’ve heard his voice, dropped their nets, and followed. In this sermon, he offers them a new way of living and loving, the path to Eternal Life.***

***In these 8 beatitudes, Jesus paints a portrait of Christian discipleship. Its cost in this world. Its fruit in the next.***

***Blessed are the poor in spirit...*** Pope Francis once said, “*this character quality suggests lowliness, a sense of one’s limitations and existential poverty*”. Jesus, the Word become flesh, enters our world in a manger. He will demonstrate to us what

it means to live simply, to resist the pull of materialism. He will draw near those who are poor. He will walk among them, heal them, and feed them.

***Blessed are those who mourn...*** To grieve is part of our human experience. As Jesus is talking to his disciples, I wonder if he is acknowledging that to follow his path, we must leave things behind. Peter, Andrew, James, and John left behind the only vocation they knew. They left behind their families...their homes.

***Blessed are the meek...*** Jesus, the Son of God, will walk on earth as a human. He will surrender his life for our world. Yet he does not feast at the King's table. He eats with tax collectors and outcasts. He resists pretentious recognition.

***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...*** Throughout the Gospels, we see Jesus teaching and praying. He worships and observes the traditions of his religion. Jesus desires relationship with his Heavenly Father.

***Blessed are the merciful...*** Mercy can be risky businesses. Remember the story of Jesus interrupting a stoning? He asks the accusers, still holding rocks, a challenging question. Who here is without sin? Let that person cast the first stone.

***Blessed are the pure in heart...*** Discipleship without a pure heart leads to a little god.

***Blessed are the peacemakers...*** He will show us what it means to reconcile people to God *and* people with one another. He will heal on the Sabbath and deal with the Pharisees on the backside. He will forgive those who know not what they are doing. He will teach us to turn the other cheek.

***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake...*** Most of the disciples gathered around Jesus will be persecuted.

***For theirs is the kingdom of heaven...*** This is Jesus' commitment: those who follow him, who seek God, will be in God's life. It is what we celebrate on All

Saints Day.... that all the saints of the Church, known and unknown, are eternally in God's life.

So, how do we take this message of Hope and Love to people living at the edge of the crowd today, where the message is hard to hear? Where the promise of Hope has been garbled by consumerism, racism, classism, tribalism. How do we bring the Beatitudes into the muck of *our* moment in history?

Maggie Thomas, a Duke Divinity pastoral intern wrote Beatitudes for our time of COVID. As I read them, I imagined Jesus sitting on the floor of our sanctuary, saying these words to us, as we gather around him:

Blessed are the poor, who are on the margins living day by day, wondering how they will care for their children and put food on the table, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, who are finding this time to be full of grief and lament, isolated from loved ones and alone with their racing thoughts, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, the ones who bring a listening ear and helping hand to those in need, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who dare to ask hard questions of our systems and leaders and dream of a future of radical change and neighbor-love, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, the doctors and nurses and hospital staff, sanitation workers and custodians, grocery store workers, social workers, farmers, caregivers, teachers, the ones who are putting themselves out there for our sake, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, the ones who bring joy amid sorrow, the children who laugh and the adults who cry, the pets who keep us company during the day, for the ones who embrace complicated emotions and cling to scraps of hope, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, who offer prayer and solace and who advocate for justice and peace, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for the sick and the poor and the uninsured and the homeless and the incarcerated who have died or will die from [COVID] and from our systems of poverty and healthcare, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

Jesus showed us how to live in this world. We must take the message of Hope and Love to those who need it. By walking among the poor, feeding those who are hungry, and wearing out our shoe leather for the sake of human dignity and justice.

Christian discipleship is not the easy path. Yet, it is discipleship that will carry us through the trials of this life and into the communion of saints.

The Hymn, *For the All the Saints*, sums up this way:

O blest communion, fellowship divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
All are one in Thee, for all are Thine.  
Alleluia, Alleluia

*Amen*