

1 November 2020
Feast of All Saints

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Blessed Are You”

Text: Matthew 5:1-12; Revelation 7:2-17; 1 John 3:1-3

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Don't think of your faith in Christ like the volume control on your TV or smartphone. It is more like an on/off switch. Either you have it or you don't. And if you do, then you are blessed and have all that faith receives - all the gifts of God.

Now, it's true that somedays your faith may be weak, like a one on that volume control. Shaky, uncertain. We all have those days. And there are other days when it's turned up to ten. But the gifts of God do not depend on where your faith is on that scale. There is no minimal volume that you must be at. Whether you're having a good day or a bad day, a strong day or a weak day, a ten day or a one day, God is giving and blessing. Because of who He is. And He won't stop.

Because you are His child. Which means you are blessed not because of what you do, but because of what Jesus has done for you, and now gives you. Which is really what the Beatitudes are about - those statements we heard from Matthew today. That what you don't have, you receive. What you give, you get back even more. And what you do not deserve, you are given by grace. Because the Beatitudes are telling us about the kind of God we have in Jesus. He is the embodiment of the Beatitudes. He has earned everything for you, and is happy to give it all to you. And not just when your faith is, say, five or higher, but even - but *especially!* - when it is lower, and you really need His gifts to give you the strength you need. To help you make it through another day.

And the chief of those gifts is His Spirit. He is the one who threw that switch of faith in you. He is the one who made you a child of God. He is the one who takes all the gifts of Jesus and gives them to you. So if you are anything like the Beatitudes, it is the work of the Spirit in you. Which means you are blessed not because of what you do, but because of what God has done in you.

Which really is the way of it with God. He's the giver, we're the receivers. And He gifts Himself to us. He gives Himself to you as Father when He makes you His child. And He doesn't just father you, He ***IS*** a father to you, and a perfect one at that. Caring, providing, protecting, teaching. And then He gave His Son for you, to redeem you, to rescue you

from sin, death, and the devil. And now His Spirit is given to you, too. To give you the forgiveness, the cleansing, you need each day. To keep you in Jesus and Jesus in you. That you live in His kingdom now, and live in His kingdom forever. All gift. From Him to you.

The saints are those who know this. Who know that our life and all we are comes from God. Who know that our works accomplish and earn nothing toward God. We are already blessed! So our works bless our neighbor. And in serving our neighbor, especially the lowest and neediest, you are like God. Giving, serving, loving.

And for this, Jesus says, will you be praised and exalted? No, actually. You will be persecuted, hated, reviled, and have all kinds of evil spoken against you. So ***rejoice and be glad!*** Wait, what? Why? They are treating you as the child of God you are. For ***so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*** So they persecuted the prophet *par excellance* - Jesus. And now you.

It's kind of a silly example, but when I was little, whenever someone came to school with new sneakers, all nice and white, all the other kids would stomp on them and dirty them up. So that your shoes would be like their shoes. Well, the world is kind of like that. When you wear the white robe of Jesus' righteousness, given to you in your Baptism, the world is going to try to dirty you up. Make you like them. It's really the opposite of what Jesus does. For Jesus wants to make you like Him. The world wants to make you like them. Jesus cleanses, the world dirties. Jesus raises, the world drags down. Jesus forgives, the world accuses. Jesus saves, the world condemns. So as a baptized child of God, Jesus says, you're going to get stomped on.

Now, sometimes, when you got new sneakers, you could try to dirty them up yourself, try to blend in so your feet wouldn't get stomped on. Christians sometimes try to do that too. Blend in. Don't stand out. Look like everyone else. Avoid the conflict, the stomping. But it really didn't work. You were usually found out. And stomped on even harder.

But it is only for a time. Because ***after this***, John saw that ***great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages.*** And look at them now! Dressed in white, their baptismal garments. And there's no more stomping. No more dirtying. No more tears. No more need. Only the fulfillment of all God's promises. The fulfillment of the Beatitudes. When Jesus will come again, and again open His mouth in blessing.

Just as He does here. Which is why the Beatitudes are not just a future blessing, but a present one. For the Lord who opened His mouth and spoke through the prophets, the Lord who opened His mouth and spoke the Beatitudes, and the Lord who opened His mouth and spoke through the apostles, is now here and still speaking through His Word. Speaking His Word of adoption in Baptism, speaking His Word of forgiveness in the

Absolution, speaking His Word of grace and gifts in the Gospel, and speaking the words of His Testament, giving you His Body and Blood. And then we open our mouths and say **AMEN!** Just like the angels and the elders and the living creatures do, as we heard in Revelation; the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. We join with them and they join us here, one holy communion, one holy fellowship of angels and saints around our Saviour. We open our mouths in confession, in praise, and to satisfy our hunger and thirst for righteousness.

And as we do, we know that we will one day join that great multitude. And our faith is strengthened - not *in order* to receive the gifts, but because we *have*, and *do*, and *will*. From our Father, His Son, our brother, and the Spirit.

So yes, blessed are you! Truly! Even when you don't feel very blessed, look very blessed, or seem very blessed. Don't measure your blessedness by how you feel, or by the things of this world and life. As John said, as children of God, ***what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him.*** And that's true because the first time He appeared, He was like us. In human flesh. In lowliness. And He was persecuted, stomped on, and hung on a cross. So that we would be blessed in Him. And so He joined Himself to us to take our sin, to take our debt, to take our death, to take our condemnation and do away with it all. So that when He comes again, it won't be to be like us, **it will be for us to be like Him.** Risen, perfect, glorified, and with a life that will never end.

You have that blessing, that promise, now, no matter where your faith-volume-knob happens to be right now. As have the saints throughout the centuries. Those saints in the Old and New Testaments - blessed. Those saints that were forced to huddle in the catacombs - blessed. Those saints who lived under oppressive governments - blessed. Those saints imprisoned or exiled - blessed. In this world they looked cursed, forgotten by God. But now look at them! Quite a different picture, when what was then hidden is now revealed. The world did not know them or care about them, but their Father in heaven did. The Son who held them in His nail-pierced hands did. The Spirit who lived in them did. And was blessing them them whole way. Examples, now, for us. For you, who may be going through some of the same sort of trials. You are not forgotten, or cursed. ***Blessed are you. Blessed are you when the Lamb is your shepherd in the midst of this world of sin and death.***

For life in this world of sin and death can be hard. And frightening. From Covid to social unrest to natural disasters to terrorism to political polarization to the sin of others that comes crashing down on us, and our own sin that so frighteningly comes out of us - and it is frightening when you see what your sin is capable of, isn't it? Frightening, were it not for the forgiveness of Jesus, for you. All in all, this world is not an easy place. And it is a sad place when our friends and loved ones succumb to the sin, evil, and death in this world. So yeah, there are times when your faith is a ten, and times when it's a one. And

maybe both in the same day sometimes! And while we do not know what the future holds, **we do know what the future holds**. We don't know what is going to happen in this world, but we do know what is going to happen for us. We will inherit the kingdom of God.

So ***rejoice and be glad!*** Not just when you're persecuted, but *even* then. For you are blessed. And while sometimes we wish we could go back to the good ol' days, when life was simpler and easier, Christians know that the good ol' days are still to come. Something to look forward to. And not in uncertainty, but because God promised. And if He opens His mouth and promises, *it will be*. And so we open our mouths and say: AMEN! Come, Lord Jesus!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.