

Gospel Reading – **Luke 6:20-31**

In echoes of the prophet Isaiah and Mary's song of praise, Jesus reveals surprising things about who enjoys blessing and who endures woe. He invites his disciples to shower radical love, blessing, forgiveness, generosity, and trust even on enemies and outsiders.

²⁰ Then [Jesus] looked up at his disciples and said:

“Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

²¹ “Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

“Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

²² “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. ²³ Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven, for that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

²⁴ “But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

²⁵ “Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

²⁶ “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

²⁷ “But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you;
²⁸ bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

*This is the gospel of Christ. **Praise to you, O Christ.***

Sermon

Grace to you, and peace, from the bringer of peace, the One who's Spirit is peace, and the One who lays down their life that we may know peace, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I don't remember my baptism. It was in September, 1976. I was about a month old.

However, *I have seen pictures!*

It was the same with my kids – they were a matter of weeks or months old when they were baptized. My eldest child was baptized by a retired pastor who has since died.

Both my children were baptized in a church-house that was sold.

I remember a story about a congregation looking to renovate their worship space. An architect was working with a building committee on the redesign. At one point, they were discussing a new font. A person on the building committee became angry, stood up and said, “my grandfather was baptized in that font, my father was baptized in that font, I was baptized in that font, and so was my child!” The architect, also a person of faith and thinking deeply about art and design, responded, “it isn't the font, it's the water and the promise.” The committee member stormed out, only to return a few minutes later, having cooled down, and said, “you're right.”

In another recollection, my ordination service was in a building that was eventually torn down and since replaced, in small-town BC. During the building of the new building a number of years later, my sister – also a pastor – had her ordination service in a school gymnasium. It was something of a “set-for-the-service,” “temporary” worship space – setup briefly in the school, there was an altar, a font, and the gathered community, to say prayers and lay hands on the new pastor. If she would want to return to the place of her ordination, one could say that it doesn't really exist! After the service, of course, it was returned immediately to its former space as a gym.

While I don't remember my baptism, I have seen pictures and heard happy memories. For years after my family moved cities and churches from where I was born and baptized, my grandmother would go to that original church's bake sales until that church eventually closed – I like to think that my taste for vinetarta started among the faithful Icelandic folks who nurtured me in my earliest years!

Sometimes we – like the building committee member who longed to hold fast to the old font – sometimes we like to have our creations *last for the ages*. We expect that what we've made will always be remembered. ...that our part in something matters *only* if it is permanent! But maybe we're not meant to be permanent. Maybe our connection to a faith community is *precisely about* acknowledging our temporary nature. A handful of decades as a lifetime – if we're lucky – is a pretty small drop in the bucket of time!

It becomes an existential question: why are we here? What is life about? Hopefully, in our journey of faith – and as we journey as a *community* of faith – we find meaning!

And, if you haven't heard it alluded to in what I've said already... our meaning isn't to be found in the *things* we have – be that our own collections of things, or our buildings and furnishings. Our meaning isn't to be found in the things we have. At some point, they lose their value, or decay, or just become out-dated. And, I want to say: *that's okay!* Sometimes certain things, ideas, or symbols, have a limited lifespan. That's okay!

Here's the thing... we *invest ourselves* in the things and creations we come up with. It's okay to care, and to put ourselves into our pursuits, but we lose sight of what truly lasts, what truly has meaning, when we think our creations should last beyond their time and we fight with others as we insist on this. Because... our journey of faith is about *relationship* beyond all else. No thing or idea ought to come between the connection we have – the connection between you and I, the connection between us and the new person.

It's also true that this isn't easy: we are called to discern, and be open to other perspectives, always. That is also part of the journey of faith, and what builds our relationships – our ability to be open to other perspectives, our ability to discern in community, and our ability and willingness to change and move to new places.

OK... it's *All Saints Sunday*.

As we remember the saints, and as we give thanks for the gift of life, we also delve into the memories we have. That is where our personal investments live on – where

the things that were important to each of us are still rooted in the memories of our loved ones. Have you ever noticed that?

We may think back fondly on the characteristics of a loved one, remembering what they held dear in their lives, and we may think back with a smile about how someone loved something we didn't, but they are still held dear in our memories. Our unique and varied ways of being, of loving what we each love, is what gives flavour and a spark to life! We can certainly celebrate the things and ideas that bring life to others, and love those things and ideas because they are loved by those dear to us! [pause]

Jesus is teaching on a plain, and those of us on the prairies know about flat places, when he speaks these *Beatitudes* – these verses, we hear, today. They are central to values we hold dear, as followers of Jesus Christ. Look at what Jesus says, and who is blessed: the poor, the hungry, those who weep. We hear that the poor will inherit the kingdom of God!

And woe to... the rich? Those who are full? Those who laugh? The rich have received their consolation! (Now, a month ago, we heard that story of the rich man and Lazarus, from Luke 16 – that was precisely the thing Jesus was talking about with the receiving their consolation! And “woe indeed” to the rich, wasn't it? That rich man feasted sumptuously in life; and was in torment in eternity.)

What kind of message can we take from these Beatitudes? The teaching continues in the verses that follow, and maybe that sums up more of the kind of lives we're being called to live: “Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you.” (vss.27-28). Why would we do that? ...love our enemies? Pray for those who mistreat us?

Society encourages us to spend our lives seeking the things that are fleeting, doesn't it? “Bigger is better! Have it now, pay later!”

Again: our meaning isn't to be found in the *things* we have; our journey of faith is about *relationship* beyond all else. When we see need, we are called to respond. “Give to everyone who asks of you.” “Do to others as you would have them do to you.”

Even more, we might hear that “Golden Rule” in a stronger way: “do to others as *they would want you* to do to *them*.” [pause]

On this All Saints Sunday, may we pursue that which gives life, and seek the welfare of our neighbours.

In working towards the good of all, and opening ourselves to the needs of others, we also work towards peace and justice in the world. As we open ourselves beyond our own needs, and as we welcome beyond our own families and close circles, we can join in the experience of others and connect in deeper ways with humanity.

Hear those words again: Love the ones who hate you; do good to those you would name as your enemy; for those who wish *you* evil, wish for *them* soft and kind hearts. If you are hurt by anyone, go to them and offer forgiveness, and if someone asks for change, give them the paper kind of money. Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone accidentally picks up what belongs to you when you drop it, let them have it and let it go. More than how you would *want* to be treated, consider how *others* would want to be treated by you.

It is in our consideration for others, and the opening of our hearts, that we create lasting legacies of compassion, kindness, justice, and peace – and that builds the Body of Christ in the world.

May we work towards that new day. May it be so.

Amen.