



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON
11-2-14

This day is about LIFE – a celebration of, remembrance of, honoring of, and invitation into LIFE!

That's why we have our Paschal candle burning. It is one of our church symbols of life, especially new life. It's our Easter candle, lit outside by fire and brought into the church at the dawn of Easter. It represents the light of Christ returning into the church and into our lives. We burn this candle every Sunday during the Easter season and then we bring it back out during the year and light it for occasions that celebrate new life – at baptisms and funerals.

And on this day – ALL SAINTS DAY – we have this light burning in our midst as we take some time to remember those who have gone before us into new life and for those who are to be welcomed into the new life of living in the Body of Christ through baptism.

So Life – today is about life. Life, life, blessed life. Or as Rabbi Abraham Heschel expressed it: “Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is Holy.”

And here we have Jesus celebrating the blessings of living as he provides us with what is known as the Sermon on the Mount or the Beatitudes. It is His teaching to us about how we might live in the world understanding ourselves as blessed. Or as I read in a commentary this week – how to be congratulated for the ways our lives are lived.

For that is what I learned is the better translation of the Greek word *Makarioi* which is used in this text. Rather than blessed – the closer translation is “Congratulations! Mazeltov- Hooray, you are poor in spirit, you are mourning, you are meek, you are hungry and thirsty for more, you are persecuted and reviled and cursed and you are merciful and pure and are peacemakers. Congratulations – what a life you get to live!

And we might recoil at that sentiment, say “wait a minute” you can't truly say it is a blessing to suffer or to be mistreated. What good is it to be rewarded later for what we are experiencing right now, especially when it feels hard? Shouldn't we be happy if we are following God's ways and teachings?

Well I don't know about happy. I heard the phrase the other day – “the tyranny of happiness” and I think that might have truth. The richness of a life lived is not in being happy, for in striving for, longing for only happiness we might find ourselves struggling for some ideal or some sort of perfection or standard that leaves us continually frustrated or attempting to avoid reality.



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What about, instead, that we do consider ourselves blessed to find ourselves experiencing different forms of suffering and struggles. How about telling myself, and others if they can hear it in the right way – this is a moment of congratulations. I am experiencing the anguish and frailties of being human and I am turning my focus into sharing this with God and others.

A group of us just finished our month long Bible study on Freedom from Worry and we were reminded of and learned the wonderful value of looking honestly and clearly at our lives and bathing every situation in the light of Christ's presence. If our focus is that in all situations God remains present and guiding and loving us – we have nothing to fear, we have nothing to avoid, we have nothing to bewail.

It's a shift in perspective, it's a shift one can take with the confidence that all things really do work for good for those who love God. It's a shift of viewpoint that Episcopal priest Steve Garnass-Holmes shared in a poem he posted online this week. He called it – Eight Blessings.

“Blessed are you who don't have it;
I give you my whole world.

Blessed are you who are broken:
I hold you close.

Blessed are you who are gentle:
My love in you will conquer the world.

Blessed are you who yearn deeply for more:
Here it is.

Blessed are you who practice mercy:
My mercy flows through you.

Blessed are you who love no matter what:
You will always know my presence.

Blessed are you who do not pass hurt on to others:
Beloved child, that's when you are most like me.

Blessed are you whom the world scorns:
I am right there with you.”



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“Just to Be is a blessing.
Just to live is Holy.”

Life.

Thanks be to God.