

Reflections on Faith and Life for All Saints, November 1, 2020

As we celebrate today the memory of those we love who have preceded us in death, I invite you to spend a few moments in thanksgiving for each person you're missing. My mother's father was perhaps the most "saintly" person I've ever known, the most like Jesus. He was a Christian Scientist—not even considered Christian by mainline denominations; his life was visual evidence of the Beatitudes.

I miss my father, who molested me when I was a young child; he died 6 years ago. I miss my half-brother, Brian, 14 years my junior, who died of a drug overdose 5 years ago; and my stepmother, an alcoholic who died alone and broken in 1994. These last three wouldn't be called "saints" by most people. But knowing the infinite, unbounded love of our Lord Jesus, I believe that they have been made whole and are among those around the throne, praising God in the words of Revelation: **Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb** (Rev. 7:10).

I've often cited my colleague in ministry, Steve Garnaas-Holmes, who sees beneath the surface meaning of scripture and brings it to new life with his insights. Here are four of his renderings of the Beatitudes.

October 29, 2014 *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.*

October 30, 2017 *Blessed are the homeless, for they shall find belonging in God. Blessed are they who have lost much, for they shall be given joy. Blessed are they who have been silenced, for God sings in harmony with them. Blessed are they who have been shamed, for their glory shines like the noonday sun. Blessed are they who stand firm, for God will be their firmness. Blessed are the truthful, for they are light in the darkness. Blessed are they who wonder, for they shall be called wonderful. Blessed are they who are afraid and yet choose love, for theirs is the dominion of God. Blessed are you when the path is frightful and you know all manner of fear and you choose love anyway. Blessed are you, and blessed is your place in the heart of all things.*

January 27, 2020 *Blessed are you who are empty-handed; you are in God's hands. Blessed are you who are brokenhearted; your broken heart is God's. Blessed are you who are powerless; love's power will never fail you. Blessed are you who wish you were closer to God; your wishing is God in you. Blessed are you who are kind; the universe will be kind to your soul. Blessed are you who seek Oneness; you are One. Blessed are you who stand with the poor; that is where God is standing. Blessed are you who are wounded when you stand for justice; you are embraced, you are enfolded, you stand among the great.*

Reflections for All Saints, p. 2

October 28, 2020 *Blessed are you who are in prison, for God preserves your dignity. Blessed are you who are depressed, for the Beloved holds you. Blessed are you who are powerless, for love is true power. Blessed are you who weep for justice, for God will establish it. Blessed are you who love in the face of hate, for you are vessels of God. Blessed are you who look for God in unlikely places, for you will see God. Blessed are you who are a healing presence, for you shall be healed. Blessed are you when people try to silence you; you are in the company of saints and prophets. Blessed are you no matter what, for grace will never be denied you—never.*

I've mentioned recently another colleague in ministry, ELCA Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber, who established a congregation called House of All Sinners and Saints, in Colorado. She's a recovering drug addict and alcoholic who, in the end, yielded to God's forgiving love for her, his claim on her life, and his call to ministry. ALL people, with no exceptions, are welcome to worship with her. Here is her version of the Beatitudes:

Blessed are they who doubt, who aren't sure, who can still be surprised.

Blessed are those who believe they have nothing to offer. Blessed are the preschoolers who cut in line at communion. Blessed are the poor in spirit. You are of heaven, and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction. Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, whose tears could fill an ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like. Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried. Blessed are those who mourn; you are of heaven, and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted anymore. Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else.

Blessed are those who no one else notices: the kids who sit alone at middle school lunch tables; the laundry guys at the hospital; the sex workers and the night-shift street sweepers.

Blessed are the forgotten. Blessed are the closeted. Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented.

Blessed are the teens who have to figure out ways to hide the new cuts on their arms. Blessed are the meek. You are of heaven, and Jesus blesses you. Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard, for Jesus chose to surround himself with people like them.

Blessed are those without documentation. Blessed are those without lobbyists. Blessed are foster kids and special needs kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved. Blessed are the burned-out social workers and the overworked teachers.

Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it.

Blessed are the merciful, for they totally get it.