Even Ordinary Saints Do Extraordinary Things: All Saints Sunday

Rev. Terrance Jacob on Matt. 5:1-12 at SALC on 11/1/26

Are we all saints? Paul calls all Christians saints! Phil. 4:21 "Greet all the saints in Christ Jesus". Yes, some are venerated to sainthood. That has been the practice in the Church for centuries. They are canonized through a process and I won't go into the details today as it includes scrutinizing their lives after they have died asking if they led an exemplary, extraordinary life and did they do extraordinary things, especially miracles. Today, All Saints Sunday, we don't focus on those canonized as saints. We look at ordinary people who have entered the "Church Triumphant". Even ordinary saints do extraordinary things.

Let's look at the beatitudes, the Gospel text for today, not in detail but only to illustrate the point. I preached on the beatitudes in February this year and am not going to repeat all that.

3 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

The poor in Spirit are those who are not haughty, not self righteous or arrogant. They understand that as Isaiah says, "our righteousness is as filthy rags." (Is.64:6) and they are totally dependent on God. Our society and culture drives us to depend on ourselves and our achievements, but not those that are poor in spirit. That makes them everyday saints, resisting the kingdom of this world, they gain the kingdom of heaven. That's extraordinary.

4 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Mourn needs to be seen in the biblical context of mourning over their sin, whether personal or corporate. Remember collective

morning in the Old Testament by declaring a solemn assembly where they wore sackcloths and put ashes on themselves. Refer to the Book of the Prophet Joel, Nehemiah, and Leviticus, for that practice. Repentance and sorrow for sin. Ordinary saints are acutely aware of their humanness and sin acknowledging, "but for the grace of God there I go." Against the grain.

5 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

They are not puffed up, but more than that. They resist pride. The worldly claim their right or feel entitled, but those whom Jesus refers to claim nothing as their right. They say, "Outside of Christ, I am not worthy." They claim nothing but inherit everything - the earth!

6 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

God's righteousness, which is the same as justice, is different from the world's justice. These are those who hunger and thirst for God's justice, passionate for the good of the world! Their hunger and thirst is not for personal gain. You don't have to be a hot shot activist to have that hunger. Ordinary people like you and me can have that, and do extraordinary things - even change systems, whether through advocacy, protests or your vote.

7 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

We are vengeful by nature, right? We want to repay evil with evil. But being merciful to those who may deserve punishment, gives us mercy. It implies an ever forgiving spirit. That's the everyday saint.

8 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

The pure in heart act for the truth, not their own and society's twisted truths that need to be fact checked. Being pure in heart is being centered on God and God's agenda alone. Not using our faith maliciously against others, but simply speaking truth from a pure heart. No hidden agendas. No tricks and false promises. Just simple purity of heart. In a conniving world that's extraordinary!

9 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Peacemakers are considered saintly and heroes in the world. Giving yourself for the sake of others. It takes risks for the sake of the community or society. It's not for the faint hearted. Children of God have a heart for peace, even when parties feel justified to fight. Don't look for Nobel Peace Prize winners, we have everyday winners, saints who make peace at home in their little ways.

10 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

These are those who are persecuted for justice work, declaring thy kingdom come on earth as in heaven. Proclaiming the values of the Kingdom of God. They do not fear the repercussions from the kingdoms of the world. Like peacemakers they make sacrifices for justice and righteousness, even when persecution is guaranteed by the earthy laws.

11 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Standing for the truth of the Gospel in all the ways already named often leads to persecution - whether it is ridicule or harsh treatment, even arrest when people trump up charges against the

Godly. These are ordinary saints with simple acts of bravery in Jesus Name.

12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

So the beatitudes are calling us into good company, like prophets. All those who do as God commands and requires of us, like the prophets did, are called blessed or saints. Even ordinary saints.

Often when people read the beatitudes, they imagine sweet, selfless people who are just being good and waiting for their reward in heaven. "Salt of the earth" is the phrase used, based on the next verse of Matthew 5, verse 13. Maybe even the kind of people who wouldn't hurt a fly. But are saints that way?

I want to end with a bit of a twist. I worked with a Lutheran Women's Group leader, Winnie in a rural area some years ago. She was a folk hero. I remember trying to find her after receiving her letter. She had read an article about my community organizing work and wrote to me asking if I would come to help them. I did not have a specific address, but she was not hard to find. Everyone knew her in her village. She was a folk hero - a saint of the church - for her kindness, compassion, commitment to the community, and love for children. A good person - salt of the earth.
However, after training the group for months as they had to fight for piped water - the authorities saw another side of her. She was demanding, threatening and angry - righteous anger, of course - because communities near them had water but not them. Even the township manager whispered "Are these church people?" Was she less of a saint now? Saints are not pushovers. They got the water shortly after. The question for us is: Do we have the courage to be saints? With God's help we can. Amen.