November 1, 2026 – The Feast of All Saints – 1 John 3:1-3 | Matthew 5:1-12

*Blessed Are You: Saints Remembered, Hope Shared*

Take a moment and look at the pew you're sitting in. Now look around the sanctuary to a pew where someone else used to sit. Not the pew of someone who is away this week. The pew of someone who worshiped here for many years and has been sitting empty for a while now. Maybe you can still see where they sat when you walk in, their warm smile greeting you. Maybe you catch yourself glancing there before you remember. Maybe you can still hear their voice singing the hymns and you'd give a lot to hear it one more time, even if they were a little loud or slightly off key.

And it's not only the pew. It's everything that came with it. The seat in the lobby after worship over coffee and cookies. The casserole dish that still has their name taped on the bottom. The way they'd stand a little too long while getting their bulletin before worship because they weren't finished talking to you. Nobody said that grief would live in such small things as a cup of coffee, the grocery store, or a hymn we've sung a hundred times.

And some of us carry more than one empty place. Some of us stopped counting a while ago, because the list got long, and when we get to be a certain age in a place like this, the list always gets long. These pews have been filled and emptied by the same families for generations. We know exactly who sat where. We could draw the map from memory.

We don't need to fix that feeling this morning. We don't need to be further along than we already are. This is the day when the church acknowledges that those loved ones — those children of God — were here, and they've entered the church triumphant, and that pain still lingers inside us.

And into this room Jesus declares, *Blessed are those who mourn.* Blessed, really? I'm pretty sure that's not the word we would choose in this situation.

In our gospel reading, Jesus sees the crowds around him and goes up the mountain with his disciples so that he can begin to teach the crowd. These crowds weren't the well off or elites, but the sick, forgotten, those who were hurting in some way. These are not people who had it all together.

What he gives them is not a to-do list. We may have been taught that the Beatitudes should be seen as the Be-Attitudes, ways we should behave. Be meek, be merciful, be pure in heart, be a peacemaker. Ways to be a better Christian and if

we work hard, we'll be blessed. But that's not what he says. He doesn't say "Be poor in spirit" or "Try harder to mourn." He says, *Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn.* He's blessing people in their present circumstance, not giving them something to work on.

You don't earn grief or get good at being poor in spirit. To be poor in spirit means you're standing there with empty hands, with nothing to bring and nothing to offer. Martin Luther's last written words — found on a note in his pocket after he died — were, "We are beggars. This is true." That's the poor in spirit. Not people who have achieved humility, but people who have nothing in their hands and know it.

And this is where the idea of the Beatitudes being a checklist starts to fall apart. If the blessing depends on what we do, then the saints that we remember today become a sort of honor roll, the ones who got it right. And those of us sitting here are the ones who didn't quite measure up. But look at who Jesus is addressing — the hungry, the grieving, the ones who have nothing. The blessing doesn't go to the people who climbed the mountain. It comes to the people who couldn't. So when Jesus calls them "blessed," he's not giving out a reward but making a statement. He looks at people with nothing to show for themselves, and he says, "God has claimed you."

There's an interesting thing happening in each of the Beatitudes, the tense of the verbs changes. It starts with *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs* is *the kingdom of heaven.* Is. Right now, present tense. The poor in spirit, the ones who have nothing already have the kingdom.

Jesus keeps going. *They will be comforted. They will inherit the earth. They will be filled. They will receive mercy. They will see God.* Will. The future. It hasn't already happened but is going to. And then at the end, he swings back to the present: *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus doesn't pick one tense. Before he gives any promises and again at the end, he tells them that the kingdom is theirs. Right now. That claim acts as bookends to the promises of the future — the comfort, the inheritance, the filling, the mercy, the seeing, the name.

So the kingdom is ours now and the promises are still on their way. That's not a flaw but rather the whole point. We live in that gap, waiting for what we don't yet see. It's similar to farming, especially when it comes to crops like winter wheat.

Winter wheat is planted toward the end of the season and by October you start to see the little green shoots come up. You start to get excited by it but then the cold and snow comes and the growth seems to stop. You can't make it grow faster nor can you dig it up to check on it. You have to trust that it will come up as intended in the spring. The same goes for those promises in the Beatitudes — the kingdom is the field and the promises are the harvest. It's already planted, already yours. They're coming, but they're not yet here. The seed isn't dead, just waiting to sprout with new life.

So we wait as well. Because like the people Jesus was teaching, we too live in the winter. But John tells us in his letter who we are while we wait, and it's the same thing we would say about those we are remembering today.

*See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and that is what we are.*

*Given*. Not, "See what love the Father has for those who earn it." John says given. It's a gift, already handed over. The name came before anything we did to deserve it. It was spoken over us at the font, when we couldn't have done anything if we'd wanted to. Most of us were carried there in the arms of a loved one.

And John isn't talking about a title. He says, *that is what we are.* Children. Not employees, not volunteers, not members in good standing. Children, which is the one thing you can't earn and can't lose by messing up.

Then he writes, *Beloved, we are God's children now.* Now, not after we've cleaned up. And he's honest about what we can't see: *what we will be has not yet been revealed.* Martin Luther put it this way: "We are not yet what we shall be, but we are growing toward it. The process is not yet finished, but it is going on. This is not the end, but it is the road." The work isn't finished, but it's going on. When Christ is revealed, we will be like him because we will see him as he is.

So every name we read this morning and those we hold in our hearts belong to that family.

And I want to be careful here, because on a day like today it's tempting to polish people. We say "a saint" and we mean someone who never lost their temper, never held a grudge, never said the wrong thing at the wrong time. We loved them, and they weren't perfect. They were children who were loved by someone who loved them first.

That's better news than the polished version. If they were held by their résumés, then the rest of us are in trouble. But they were held by the Father's love, the same love that holds you.

John ends the thought with something easy to misread: *All who have this hope in him purify themselves.* That's not a new assignment. It's the road Luther was talking about, the slow cleansing of people who already belong. You don't grow to become a child of God. You grow because you are a child of God.

And that's how I think about every person we remember this morning. They weren't finished either. They were on the road, and now they've arrived where the rest of us are still headed.

Back on the mountain, Jesus isn't finished just yet with the Beatitudes. He saves one more blessing for the end, and he says it directly to the people in front of him, the disciples: *Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

He doesn't say "blessed are they." After eight blessings spoken over people in general, he turns and points his finger at the ones listening. *Blessed are* you. You, the ones who follow me, you're in this line too. The prophets, the faithful, the ones who carried this faith long before any of us were born, you belong with them.

John says the world does not know us, because it did not know him. Maybe you've felt that. Maybe you've been the one at the table who said something unpopular because you thought it was right. The saints we remember were not always comfortable people to have around. Like the prophets, some of them saw the world and decided something needed to be said or done. They told the truth, even if it cost them something. We remember them for that strength and courage.

So here is where we stand. We stand in a long line of the held and the claimed, the ones who didn't have it together and were blessed anyway. Some of them are in our memories this morning. Some of them are in the pews beside us. And we're going to walk out of here and carry on in that line.

As we sang earlier, "Oh blest communion, fellowship divine, we feebly struggle, they in glory in shine; yet all are one in thee, for all are thine."

And all of God's people said, Amen!