

Most of you probably recognize these words, right? What are they? The Beatitudes. To beatify someone is to make someone a saint. These words are reminders that we, like all of the saints who have gone before us, are saints as well.

You might also think of these words and think, "Ah, this is the Sermon on the Mount." And they are similar words. Except when we read this version in Luke, Jesus is on level ground and we call it the Sermon on the Plain. Why the difference? Does it matter?

About twelve of your friends in this service are in the Education for Ministry program on Tuesday nights, and they – perhaps others, too – can tell you that the Gospel of Matthew was written to convince Jews who were not yet Christians that Jesus was indeed the Messiah that they were waiting for. So, the more he could seem like the hero Moses, the more he seemed like the Messiah. Moses went up a mountain to receive the Ten Commandments; Jesus went up the Mountain to deliver these Beatitudes.

In Luke, addressed to the Gentiles, comparing Jesus to Moses is not so important. Plus, Luke is particularly interested in the poor and the oppressed. One can almost see Jesus putting himself on an equal footing with them when he speaks these words we hear today. Or at least, that is how I see it.

And, again, these are important All Saints words, to remind us that we are all holy, sanctified, saints. Beatitudes are statements of blessings. When one is blessed, one is holy, saintly. We are on a journey, and our journey leads us to wholeness, and saintliness. In fact, were Paul writing to us today, he would call us Saints, because for him, believers are Saints.

Most of you have probably been taught at some time or another that Halloween is "All Hallows Eve," – Hallows being Saints. One Halloween, Tom and I dressed up (he as a vampire; me as a black cat) and went to First Congregational Church of Los Angeles where there was a special Halloween organ event. One organ piece played was an arrangement of Dance Macabre, which is in part a piece depicting skeletons in a graveyard arising and dancing with one another until the sun rises and they have to go back down to their graves. There was a black light show that went with that piece.

Next, they showed the 1925 silent classic, "Phantom of the Opera," with Lon Chaney. And, with that, the "Theater organist of the year" (who knew they still gave out that award) played as the silent movie was shown. That's one scary movie. Not like the grand musical of today's Broadway. And that phantom is not a person you would ever feel sorry for. He is disfigured. But he is far more evil than today's singing phantom. He carries heavy scars of his past. He can't let them go.

All Saints Day is a call for us to rise up, not as skeletons in a graveyard, and not as people carrying scars of the past, but as those pressing forward in a journey together, as Saints. As believers, sanctified, holy, whole, blessed, happy, joyful! With the Spirit of God living inside and residing among us. With the assurance that God is with us in all circumstances, through our whole journey through life. God is in control. God has a plan and a purpose. And, part of our joy is that none of it is ours to worry over!

This Gospel is read today to teach us not to cling too tightly to our possessions, or try to control our lives to conform to our plans. If we have learned how to surrender our egos and give ourselves away. If we have lived in such a way that we do not cling too tenaciously to or try to control those things we think of as "ours", and remember that all we have comes from God, then we can really live life with the joy that sets us free. Rejoice and leap for joy. God is in control. And that IS a good thing! Amen.