

On this All Saints Sunday, we come with stories before us, within us, and among us.

We come with stories of the saints we remember from our community here at Grace.

- Delores and Irene and Jerry and Walt and Art, mothers and fathers and friends.
- We remember Carolyn, who touched the lives of so many of our students at Grace School as well as the teachers and staff who worked alongside of her.
- In preparing this week's worship bulletin, Laura Zimmer pointed out that a year ago Mike Meyer had his name listed in our bulletin like he does this morning, but last year on All Saints Sunday, Mike was here serving as a lector and proclaiming "the blood of Christ shed for you" as he helped serve communion.

Yes, we come this morning with stories of loved ones who led us in the faith, the saints that have long gone before us or who have more recently died. Last week as we studied the texts for today, staff and others remembered pastors and mothers and fathers and sisters and brothers who influenced their faith and helped to form them as followers of Christ.

Such specific stories haven't always been a part of All Saints Day. Back around the 7th century, when this festival first became a part of the church year, it was meant for a more limited group of saints, for only those saints recognized by the church who hadn't been given a day of their own. And they too are included this morning, as we look around our worship space, at the reredos or on the pulpit or at the windows and we remember the likes of apostles and prophets and well-known saints in the history of the church catholic, the church universal.

With the Reformation, the recognition of all baptized children of God as saints (at least in the reforming churches) broadened the stories to be brought forth on this festival day.

"For All the Saints" we'll sing together. "For *all* newborn soldiers or servants."

For all the saints and for all their stories, we give thanks.

We are a people of story. Now, I don't mean in a fairy tale, once upon a time way.

We are a people of story in that we are shaped by an experience and a history much bigger than ourselves or even our individual communities.

At the beginning of each rotation in Sunday School, we begin with what we call a "Story Sunday." And for the scripture text or texts that will serve as our focus for four or five following weeks, we listen to a story. Or we experience a part of the story. Or, sometimes we act out the story together.

In worship, we have a "Story Sunday" every week. We listen to readings, we pray for the needs of the world and local community, we greet one another in the language of scripture.

This Sunday, our gospel story is the kick-off to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We might be familiar with these verses, knowing that they're called the Beatitudes:

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

Blessed are those who mourn.

Blessed are the meek and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted.

Blessed are.

Blessed are.

Every commentary I picked up this week warned against the same thing in this passage.

Jesus is not saying be poor in spirit, be meek or pure or persecuted.

Jesus is not commanding the disciples and us to mourn.

Make peace! Hunger and thirst for righteousness!

Jesus is not setting up if, then clauses here,

if you make peace, then you will...

if you are meek, then you will...

Although it would be good and right for us to do or embody such things,

Jesus' is being descriptive here, not prescriptive.

To break it down, Jesus is speaking of a how God provides love and hope to the people who need to hear it. Jesus isn't speaking to the worldly-powerful here, to the in-crowd necessarily (and if they were to overhear, such language might worry them).

Jesus is setting down a story as the disciples begin their ministry.

He's bringing them hope for some hope-challenged times.

Blessed are you who feel these things, are these things, do these things now,

even when the world would lift up violence and destruction and oppression.

Matthew's original audience would have been smack-dab in the middle of persecution when they first heard this. Blessed are you, I am the bearer of hope, Jesus is saying.

When the world sets up systems that are meant to bring woe upon God's people,

When the world elevates those who bully and hunger for power,

When we participate in such worldly ways,

Jesus calls to us into this different story of power and blessedness.

Jesus lives a life of service,

Jesus dies like a criminal,

and Jesus overcomes...

Jesus swallows up death forever.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid,

the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. (Isaiah 11.6)

...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks (Isaiah 2.4)

My spirit rejoices in God my savior,

who has lifted up the lowly,

who has fed the hungry with good things (Luke 1.47, 52, 53)

The host arrayed in white sings,

"Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor

and power and might
be to our God forever and ever!" (Revelation 7.12).

These refrains of reversal, these stories of hope are part of the greater narrative of God's people.

Such scripture bears hope for the saints in all times,
that God is faithful and loving and merciful and just.

In every time, in every place, to all the saints, God is faithful.
Through Christ, we know divine blessing.
In baptism, we are knit into this story of love and blessing and hope.

On this All Saints Sunday, we hear Jesus' proclamation of blessedness, of hope in story.
May we be reminded of such precious gifts every time we gather,
around wine and bread,
under water sprinkled overhead.

Rejoice and be glad.
Take heart. Have hope.
Blessed are you, saints of God.

As people of story, we come with our own tales of faith and our own narratives of struggle.
But we are also part of something bigger,
in Christ who bears life and love, blessing and hope to the world.

I saw a beautiful piece of needlepoint this last week while visiting one of our members.

She shared stories with me of her faithful forebears in black and white photographs and in the book she wrote about her family. She showed off pictures of the grandkids and of her other relatives and of her grandmother, who at 13 years old came to the United States alone.

One more thing, she said to me as I left her apartment.

Pointing to a framed needlepoint picture of a tree, she told me a cousin had made it for her,
and she explained to me all the names that were present there.

Among the roots, were the names of her parents and her grandparents,
those that have gone before,
those who have provided a foundation.
And on the trunk was her name with her husband's,
Up in the branches and among the leaves
were the names of her sons and their wives and all the grandchildren.

In her story and in the needlepoint created by a cousin,
I was reminded that as saints with stories, we have hope all around us.
The roots that have gone before,
The trunk, may it be sturdy in faith and service now,
The leaves and the branches yet to come.

God is faithful, my sisters and brothers.

Blessed are you dear saints,

for God's faithful handiwork has stitched us

into a tree of life and love, of blessing and hope.

To the glory of God.