

Blessed Are Those That Mourn
Matthew 5:12
Revered Loren McGrail
Irondequoit United Church of Christ
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for they shall be comforted. So says Jesus to those who climbed to the top of the hill to be with him. Once again Jesus lays out to his followers what the good news is and for whom. He looked out and saw a bunch of nobodies who were oppressed in every way possible, so he blessed them and reminded them that in God's kin-dom they would find freedom, justice, and yes, comfort.

These beatitudes are not commandments or even rules on how to behave but rather the truth about the way God's kin-dom works, God's "normal" and it is not new. The world says law and order, get as much as you can any way that you can, but Jesus says love, love even more. God's favor does not rest with the well-fed, well-off, well-liked, or even the politically correct. It rests with those who have nothing---no homes, no nest eggs, no credit cards, no papers, even no hope. God's heart aligns with these people.

Irondequoit United Church of Christ long ago you chose to align with this teaching/preaching Jesus, not the empty cross. You chose this bigger than life and yes very pale Jesus to follow. When you look at the budget this year, I invite you to think about how you are listening to or following this Jesus who calls us to care for the nobodies of this world; how we are taking care of the disenfranchised by feeding the poor and supporting organizations in our communities that are providing food and essential services; how we are standing with our denomination and its ongoing call for racial justice and inclusive love, for the protection of our fragile planet and all its creatures, for all our neighbors and all our children including those separated from their parents or locked in cages. Remember that IUCC has been called "to be the church" not only to have a building called a church. Remember, that just like how voting should reflect our values so should our budget.

Let this Jesus and his message of who in God's eyes are blessed guide you in your discernment.

Passing a budget and stewardship are not only about money but how we put into action what are faith calls us to do.

There are many things that our faith is calling us do right now----to vote our values, to stand up for those whose vote is being suppressed, denied, or stolen. If the Beatitudes are God's picture of the world, how does our budget, our worship, and our faithful witness measure up?

Towards this end, I would like us today, on this All Saints Sunday, when we remember all those who have gone before us, our loved ones and our great cloud of witnesses whose lives were organized around higher principles like the human capacity for love, sacrifice, and generosity, to recommit ourselves to aligning our lives with God's shalom.

The early church was a persecuted sect, so Christians used this day when the veil is thin as the Celts say, to lift up and remember the martyrs and saints. And since we are all saints and sinners as Martin Luther said, I invite you this year, this year of so much death and suffering on so many levels to mourn and lament for all that we have lost.

We can enter this space of deep lamentation, grief, sorrow, and loss because we trust, and some can feel God's abiding accompaniment. It shows up in many forms including how God uses each of us.

On Thursday I went to have a flu shot, the super-duper one for people over 65. While the doctor prepared the paperwork, like a Catholic at confession, I told him I had had Covid-19. I didn't need absolving but wondered about how this flu I was being vaccinated against might be related to the Covid I had already been through and fought off. We talked about antibodies and I asked his opinion about immunity. He said, "Don't forget your T-cells. They kick in after the antibodies. They are part of your body's memory and will help if you come into contact with the virus again. Your body will remember." I can't remember all the many things I need to do each day, but I remember the name of my middle school science teacher and now I am told my body will remember how to fight for me. Sometimes good news comes from the the most unlikely sources

So, what does this have to do with mourning and this being All Saints Sunday you might be wondering? Everything.

It means we can enter into a space of deep loss and grief because we already have the strength, the stored memory within to get through.

When I returned home from my visit to protect myself from some unknown future virus, filled with the vaccine and a restored hope in my T-cells that I didn't even know I had, I wrote this sliver of a poem for you:

Dear Ones, pray for those who are facing storms and fire,
Pray that they find shelter and the damages not catastrophic.

Dear Ones, weep aloud all your pandemic sorrows--
for each number is a life now gone. A grandmother,
a daughter, a husband no longer here.

Dear Ones, remember all the Black and Latino deaths
at the hands of police. Help us remember
their names beginning with David Prude
who died on March 30th
naked in the snow on our streets.

Dear Ones, cry out against injustice---
vote, vigil, dissent, resist, and take to the streets
to protect and defend our democracy if necessary.
Move us to stand up, listen, and not stand down
until your blessings become reality for all.

Dear Ones, keen for the loss of the songbirds, bees,
and trees, the polluted rivers, and oceans full of plastic.
Help us to use our grief as fuel to become your
warriors for ecological justice.

Dear Ones, breathe through the pain and grief
you have stored or covered up.

Breathe it in and breath it out.

Marvel at how your breath can carry you through.

Remember also how your T-cells will remember
and fight for you. How your heart
can break and expand at the same time.

Jesus, said, “Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.” Jesus, we need
this now. Be with us in this darkening time
and when the time is right, send us out
to comfort others even while our tears
are still flowing.

Amen.