

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Matthew 5:1–12**

**Sermon: All Saints 2019**

Pope Gregory IV (died 844) shifted the feast of All Martyrs' Day from May 13 to November 1 and renamed it All Saints' Day. Unlike All Souls' Day, this feast was retained by Luther and the reformers and elevated to a major festival.

The Lutheran Church has had the closest of connections with Reformation Day and All Saints' Day. "Made white in the blood of the Lamb" parallels the shift from the liturgical red of Reformation Day to the white of All Saints' Day

The great festivals of Reformation Day and All Saints' Day have always been closely related. Traditionally, they were always celebrated one day right after the other, October 31 and November 1. Now we celebrate them on the closest Sunday to the actual dates, like last Sunday we observed the celebration of the Reformation and today we celebrate "All Saints day."

Even though they actually were Thursday and Friday of this past week. So obviously there's a lot of history behind the connection. What really connects Reformation Day with All Saints', though, is their common theme: both are ultimately about how sinners can receive the blessings of right standing before a holy God.

And here's an ironic twist: when on that first Reformation Day the monk Martin Luther called into question Rome's indulgences, he also called into question the thousands of revenue-generating relics held by his prince right in the Castle Church where he was nailing his theses, right on the eve of All Saints'.

Those relics of the saints were part of the church's system to give people that right standing before God and the blessings that would come with it. We hear about those blessings in our Gospel this All Saints' Day, the Beatitudes. So how do those blessings work? How do we receive them? Let's consider two possible "systems" for our blessedness before God: is it piecemeal or is it all in or all out?

Consider the piecemeal approach. Think about those relics. Here's that system: A few special people—St. Matthew, St. Paul, St. Peter, Mary the mother of Jesus—had in their lives accomplished more good works than they needed to earn heaven. Yep, they're called saints. These saints' extra merits are now supposedly available to us plain folks who still need help getting to heaven. And by various acts like viewing the bones or locks of hair of those saints, their relics we get some of their merit. It's a piecemeal approach a little more of this, a little more credit; a little more of that you get the picture.

The world and our worldly nature believes that the only way to be blessed by heaven is through the old-fashioned way of earning it. The unbelieving world believes that, as Rome teaches, God gives a little grace and only gives more grace to those who do well in handling it. If God's grace is squandered or unappreciated, then heaven's faucet is turned off. This is how the world works, and this is how the world's religions work. Piecemeal.

But God's Law reveals that we're either all in or all out. The Holy Scriptures show that it is not the degrees of goodness we manufacture or the level of merit we earn that affects the Almighty's dispensation of his grace and blessing.

The prophets and apostles make it clear that it is not our good intentions or good works that make us somehow worthy of God's commendation. Our blessedness before the holy and righteous One has nothing to do with the appearance of our behavior or our attempts to will what is good. No, the fall was a great fall that caused Adam and Eve and all their children to lose every shred of blessedness within themselves.

We are a fallen humanity that even if we want to do good has lost the ability to know the good or act it out. All our intentions are hopelessly stained with sin and self-centered motivations. The Law of God is good and wise, but it condemns sin and sin-stained actions. All of them. All of us. In this way, Jesus' Beatitudes condemn us.

Outside of Christ, we are not pure in spirit; we do not mourn our poor and miserable condition; we are not single-willed; we do not seek after the Lord's kind of righteousness and mercy; we pit ourselves against our neighbor and against God; we dodge and grumble against following Christ in his suffering.

For the old, will-never-believe nature we drag around until Christ comes again, the Beatitudes do not excuse but accuse and condemn. All moral behavior selfishly looking for some kind of earned reward is tainted and spoiled with sinful self-promotion.

For those who think the Ten Command-ments are attainable, Jesus comes to show clearly that heaven's will is much more unachievable than we think. "You have heard it said, . . . but I say to you" removes any silly notion that we can even begin to fulfill the Beatitudes on our own steam. For that old, sinful nature that still tries to make its way back into the driver's seat, the Beatitudes silence all attempts to excuse self and accuse others of a worse job of "doing" them to earn God's blessing.

As Dr. David P. Scaer has said, “There is no suggestion in the Beatitudes of a cause and effect” (*The Sermon on the Mount: The Church’s First Statement of the Gospel* [St. Louis: Concordia, 2000], 76). That means none of us—including Paul and Peter and Mary—could be saints by our works. There’s no little bit, little bit more. No piecemeal. We’re not all in, so . . .

So, then, is it all out for all of us? There is One who shines in the face of God and his commands—his Beatitudes. It is Christ who does the Beatitudes perfectly because it is Christ who perfectly embodies the holy will and Law of God. The Law, even though it was given through Moses, points to Christ as its fulfillment.

Jesus is the righteous Son of Adam and the One who will come to judge the quick and the dead on that great and terrible Day of the Lord. However, Christ is greater than even the Law. Jesus is not simply the commands of God in human flesh; he is the whole Word of God incarnate, “*founder and perfecter of our faith.*”

His justice serves his mercy; his holiness serves his loving kindness and compassion for a wayward, turned-into-itself humanity (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Therefore, blessed are those who have the Good News of this Jesus preached to them! Through Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection, the kingdom of heaven is established for the very unsaintly likes of us (vs 3, 10). This is the greatest of heaven's merciful blessings: the Gospel of free, gracious forgiveness and reconciliation proclaimed, announced, declared through the Word of God incarnate and his cross and his Baptism and his Supper. Through the Word and Sacraments, we are now declared blessed—saints!—in Christ. All in!

The “treasury of merits” was never property of Rome or Wittenberg to parade and barter piecemeal on All Saints' Day. All of Christ and his perfect life and sacrificial death in our place is ours the hour we are washed and made his own. All the baptized—on earth and in heaven—are the Lord's precious, bought-with-his-blood saints.

Amen