

## **Sermon from All Saints' Day** **November 01, 2020; Preacher: Vicar Silke Fahl**

As we remember everyone, we have lost over the past year on this All Saints Day, we also remember other people. People we have lost years ago and people we didn't even know personally. I'm thinking of my grandmother and my grandfather. Both died a few years and even though the pain has dulled, I still miss them. But I also think of the countless other people who have died because of war and violence. And I think of the nearly 2 million who have already died of COVID-19. And while we can't light an individual candle for all of them, I'm glad we lit one collectively for them earlier in this service.

Very life lost weighs heavy on us. Even more so when we lose someone we loved. For most of us most years go by without losing a loved one or someone we know. And while we always hear about deaths on the news, it generally doesn't affect us as closely. Yet this year I find that we are all affected in one way or another by what has been happening. By all the lives that have been lost. Too often we heard about shootings, violence and police brutality costing lives. Too many people have drowned in the Mediterranean Sea trying to find safety for themselves and their families. Every time we open a new paper, the websites of news and public health agencies or social media we see a rising death toll due to COVID-19.

It makes my heart heavy and while I'd wish that we could meet friends and family safely again. That we could embrace each other. I also fear that case numbers will only rise again the moment we stop being careful and mindful. Yet I also see the toll this pandemic takes on so many people for a multitude of reasons. People losing their jobs. Businesses closing. The mental health of so many is deteriorating. People in the streets not knowing if they'll survive the winter with the support systems closed or reduced.

While thinking about all this, feeling the weight of our worries and fears and remembering our loved ones, we hear the so called Beatitudes this morning. A text that seems to stand at odds with our current situation and with this day of remembrance. They form the beginning of the of the sermon on the mount. One of Jesus's long speeches in the Gospel according to Matthew. And while we have heard them just now in German, I would like to read them once more in English:

<sup>1</sup>When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup>"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

*4" Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

*5" Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

*6" Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

*7" Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

*8" Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

*9" Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

*10" Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*11" Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."*

Amen.

The Beatitudes are one of those biblical texts I like a lot. Maybe especially because my parents picked verse 9, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God*" as my baptismal verse. Shortly before Christmas it will be 33 years that this verse accompanies me and to me it's a verse that is both comfort and encouragement.

Yet this text holds a lot of questions for me at the same time. Some questions I have all the time. But today I'm wondering in particular how the Beatitudes and the remembrance of our dead go together. How do we read, what do we take from a text that is both a blessing and a call for action on a day like this?

When I look at verse 4, "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted*" it's easy enough to see the correlation. For this verse is a word of hope in moments of grief and sorrow. It reminds me of revelations 21 where it says, "*God will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more*". Both verses remind us that death is not the end. They remind us of our faith as Christians that we will see each other again. That we will be reunited with our loved ones.

But what about the other verses? Especially those who are a call for action? What can we take away from them on this day? How can this text help us and comfort us? After all: Who is always meek, merciful and pure in heart? Who is always a peacemaker and thirsts and hungers for righteousness every second of their life? If we understand this text in such away that we have to be all those things in every moment of our lives it will be overtaxing and discouraging. After all, no matter how hard we try we can never be all

this all the time. We are only human after all and the only one who was all this all the time was Jesus.

Yet there are also other ways to read and interpret this text. Personally, I read this text as a prompt and encouragement to follow Jesus and to do what we can to live according to these blessings and calls to action. Yet I don't read it as an expectation for us to always live up to it, to always be perfect. After all, we are fallible humans and not God. And that is perfectly fine and as it should be.

And my experience is that, if you don't read a text like this as a "must be", but as a goal you aim for again and again, you can be proud of yourself for reaching now and then and you stop beating yourself up for not being all of this all the time. As with everything else in life: Perfection isn't possible. But we try and fall. We get back up and try again. We get better. We fall again. We reach our goal. And then we dare to dream of a bigger goal, of becoming even better. Sometimes we have to adjust our dreams and goals for a multitude of reason, but generally speaking we don't give up hoping and dreaming. At least not forever.

But let us get back once more to the Beatitudes.

Especially today I also read this text as an invitation to remember the people in my life, both those who I have lost and those who are still living, and to think about moments when I have experienced them in such a way. When have I felt God's presence through them? When have they been Christ to me or other people? When have they been meek, merciful or a peacemaker towards me or other people? When did I see them long for justice?

All these aren't questions we can answer easily, quickly or in passing. And we shouldn't try to. If possible and if it isn't too painful yet we should take our time as we reflect on this. If it feels right and good maybe, we can even talk to other people about it. Either way, I wish you all strength and God's blessings at this day of remembrance and on all the days to come.

Amen.

*"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

Amen.