

If I'm being honest, I don't always love the beatitudes, especially *Luke's* beatitudes, for All Saints Sunday. With the blessings and woes, it seems to steer us into a direction I don't want to go, pitting us against them, saint against sinner, blessing against woe, now against then.

I don't believe this is Jesus' purpose here. In Luke, Jesus is always talking about reversing the current order of things, toppling power structures and flipping things on their head. Just look at the Magnificat, Mary's song of praise after she becomes pregnant with Jesus: God casting the mighty down from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.

I think these beatitudes are almost another example of that.

Whenever I read passages like this, these harsh words from Jesus, these woes sound like threats—ominous ones. “Watch out!” they say, “This could happen to you!” But I wonder if they are more a naming of reality...two realities, really.

One reality that states that when one lives as a disciple of Jesus, their life will change. When they share what they have, they might individually have less, but the collective will have more. When they advocate for justice, they might lose the goodwill of people who profit off other's oppression. When they can no longer ignore the suffering of others, their hearts will be open to feeling that communal pain.

And there's a second reality, a reality that states that nothing is permanent but God. Everything else can fade away, can be lost in a second, cannot be counted on, cannot be taken with us...everything but God who loves us and has claimed us.

And so the challenge begins in verse 27, to everyone who is listening, not just those who might have the blessings or woes directed at them. To Everyone.

And man, the bar is set so high! It may be that we've heard these so many times that we don't feel their full impact anymore, but these are hard things! Praying for people who persecute us. Giving away additional clothing to people who have stolen from us. Offering up ourselves in a nonviolent way when someone strikes us. *Love your enemies!*

Dang. This is not easy.

It's All Saints Sunday, the day we remember those who have gone before us, who have passed along the faith to us, those who have lived holy lives...right?

The tendency, when we think of the Company of Saints, is to think of them as paragons. As perfect. As disciples who were so faithful they never faltered. That's not reality, is it? No person is perfect, and I can think of lots of people who fell quite far from perfect who are counted among that host.

And yet, we trust and believe and *know* that they are with God because God keeps God's promises.

In 2014, a few months before I was ordained, my grandfather died. He was my mom's dad, also a Lutheran pastor and a great carpenter.

What he wasn't, however, was always easy to get along with.

He had strong ideas about what was right and what wasn't right, which meant that there were a lot of topics our family had silently decreed were forbidden to bring up with him.

We didn't talk about education, because inevitably that would lead to a discussion about how terrible the education system had gotten.

We didn't talk about politics, because no one wanted to hear how the politicians he didn't like were ruining the country.

And we didn't talk about religion, if we could help it. My grandpa was not comfortable with women in leadership roles in the church, which meant that my mother's work as a rostered leader was difficult for him to swallow and when I was planning to go to seminary, he told me that "Jesus called twelve disciples and not one of them was a woman," leading to a blowup that ceased communication between him and my immediate family for months.

This was my grandpa. I loved him, but our relationship was marked and broken by all the things we couldn't talk about and the things he sometimes decided to say.

My grandma died a couple years before he did. Less than a year, actually, after that blow-up that causes such a break in our family. She had always been the one to smooth things over when conflict arose in the family. She was the one who made sure we knew how much we were loved. And when she died, my grandpa came to a realization.

He had been reading her journals. She had been keeping a journal since my mom was in her twenties. In reading her words and her thoughts, he realized that been pushing everyone he loved away. He realized that if he wanted to have a relationship with his children and grandchildren, he needed to make a change, because my grandma wasn't there to make things better anymore.

He did make a change. He made an effort to tell my mom that he was proud of her, something he had never told her before. When I graduated from seminary, he gave me this cross (point to cross) which my grandma had given him years earlier. Some of the things we could never bring up around him were now able to be spoken.

It wasn't that he changed his mind overnight about his long-held beliefs, but he now knew that relationships were more important than being right and showing everyone else how wrong they were.

By the time he died, my family was thankful that we'd had at least a few years of being in relationship with him. It didn't erase all the difficult years, the hurt and pain that we went through, but it was important for us at least to know that he wanted to know us and support us.

It was troubling, then, to attend his funeral. The sermon preached at his funeral ignored all of the difficulty. It painted my grandpa as a man he wasn't—or at least as a man he wasn't always to us. It lauded his ministry and his dedication to the church, which were true, but it was a funeral sermon for a pastor without fault, and not the man who I remembered both denigrating my call as pastor *and* acting out the story of the three little pigs to make my siblings and I laugh when I was young. He did both.

To add to this, the pastor giving the sermon and leading the funeral never once referred to my grandpa by his name. He never talked about *Emmett* Schmitt, the father, the husband, the son, the grandfather. He only talked about *Pastor* Schmitt, the paragon of religious virtue.

As I've said, this is the problem sometimes when we talk about saints. When we call someone a saint, we only want to look at their positive qualities. We only want to pay attention to the “holy” things they did, and ignore the rest.

But a person's actions aren't what defines them as “saint.” “Saint” doesn't necessarily define someone by the life they lived, but by their status as a child of God.

Pastor Schmitt is not a saint because he was ordained, or preached the Gospel, or fed people with the body and blood of Christ. *Emmett* Schmitt is a saint because God claimed him in the waters of baptism and worked in him throughout his life. Being a saint and a sinner aren't mutually exclusive: they go hand in hand. Grandpa had his share of sins, but still, we call him “saint.” And we still count him among that communion that praises God without ceasing, along with so many others I have loved and who have died.

All Saints is often emotional or even said, especially for anyone who has lost someone recently or for whom the grief is still fresh.

But All Saints is also a day of celebration: a day to give thanks for these people we've loved. A day to acknowledge the reality of their lives and their status as child of God. A day to remind ourselves of all the ways we are still connected to them.

If you ever need a reminder, you don't need to look any further than our communion liturgy. Each week, during the Great Thanksgiving, I say some version of this:

“And so, with all the choirs of angels,
with the church on earth and the hosts of heaven,
we praise your name and join their unending hymn:”

And then we sing “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and in that moment we are joined with that
communion of saints who are already with God and who offer praise without ceasing.

Saints in heaven. Saints here in this room. Saints because God has made it so.

Amen.