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Luke 6:20-31

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Ancestry.com exists because so many of us have lost touch with our past. We don't know where we came from. We don't know the folks who peopled our family tree. And so a lot of people have turned to genealogical companies like Ancestry.com to learn about their family heritage—to learn who their people were, when they came to this country, and where they came from. Many of us feel that knowing the answers to our family heritage can help us have a greater sense of who *we* are, and can help ground our own existence in this world.

All Saints Day is Ancestry.com for the Christian community. On All Saints Day, the Christian community reflects on the people who came before us. We do so in part to honor their lives but also so that we can have a greater sense of who *we* are and so we can find grounding for our existence in this world.

So today we look back on our spiritual family tree and we contemplate those who came before us in the faith, and we contemplate what their legacy means for us.

We all hope when delving into our family genealogy to find ancestors who were noble, courageous, good, and honorable. But what we usually find are ordinary people who were pretty flawed. And the same is true as we in the Christian church look back on our spiritual ancestors. Whether these ancestors lived hundreds of years ago or whether they were people who died a month ago, the saints of the church were not and are not perfect people.

Saints are first and foremost sinners--sinners who are made holy by God's grace and the call to walk God's holy way. Saints are sinners who know they need God, who recognize their own vulnerability and weakness and brokenness, and turn toward God. And *that* is what makes a

saint—a person who knows their emptiness and need, and who turns to God, and receives grace. And in response, in response to this gift of love and mercy, those sinners then strive to walk the way of Jesus.

Some of the atrocious ancestors we turn up in our spiritual family tree lost sight of this important element of what it means to be a saint of God. Think about those Christians involved in terrible activities throughout history: the Crusades, the Inquisition, the slave trade, the running of abusive Native American boarding schools. In their quest for power, for dominance, for glory, for power, for money, these people lost touch with the way of Jesus Christ. And such people exist still today in the various communities of Christians.

We hear Jesus in our gospel lesson today lay before his followers what his way looks like. In radical contrast to the ways of the world which honor the powerful, the wealthy, and the healthy, Jesus tells his followers that the way of God honors those who are poor, those who are hungry, those who are filled with sorrow, those who are hated and excluded. Those are the people who receive God's special attention, and should thus, receive the attention of Jesus' followers.

Jesus goes on to add even more astonishing credentials to what it means to be his follower: it means to love enemies, to pray for the very people who want to harm us, to respond benevolently to those who are cruel to us. Jesus' way is nothing short of counter-cultural. To be a saint of God, then, is to be a person who honors this way of being in the world, and who makes that their life's ambition.

And thankfully, some of those folks turn up in our spiritual family tree as well. These flawed sinners became saints of God because they accepted God's grace and endeavored to walk the way of Jesus: people like St. Francis of Assisi, and Mother Teresa, and Dorothy Day, and

Martin Luther King, Jr, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Maybe you have just such a saint in your life, someone you personally know or knew who inspired you to walk Jesus' radical way of love.

The Apostle Paul tells us that such people have given us an inheritance. That's what family members do, don't they? They pass on an inheritance to the next generation. That inheritance might be their DNA or it might be family heirlooms or land or wealth.

The Apostle Paul writes that we Christians "have obtained an inheritance." This inheritance comes from Christ and is passed on through the saints. But this inheritance is not our brown eyes or curly hair, and this inheritance is not the family china or the antique rocking chair. Rather, the inheritance we receive is the way of Jesus Christ—the radical, unconventional way of Christ which is grounded in radical, unconventional love. Despite our terribly messed up lives, despite our terribly messed up world, we are deeply loved by God. And we are summoned to accept this love and to live this love. To accept this love and to live this love is to be our life's ambition.

This is what the saints of God, however flawed they were and are, have passed on to us saints sitting here today. This inheritance is more important than anything else they could have left us. Nothing can take this inheritance away from us. If our church building were to crumble, we still have the way of Jesus Christ. If our membership numbers dwindle so we Christians become nothing but a holy remnant in society, we still have what the Apostle Paul calls, "the riches of Christ's glorious inheritance." We have the way of Jesus Christ.

I wonder if you realize that this inheritance means that your life is very, very meaningful. You and I have been entrusted with the family treasure: the way of Jesus Christ. And that makes your life part of a very sacred legacy. This sacred legacy was first acknowledged in your

baptism. But it is helpful for us to remember throughout our lives that we have this legacy which then means that our lives matter. Our lives are sacred. We are part of a sacred legacy of receiving God's love and then giving our lives over to this love. That is what the saints of God do.

Many of us take a lot of pride in our family genealogy. But when you consider our biological genealogy, you and I are only here because some people in the past lived long enough to have children.

But our Christian genealogy tells us that our existence is rooted not in some piece of biological good fortune, but in the grace of God and the way of Jesus Christ. Sainthood comes when, in our messy, complicated, broken lives, you and I strive to place our grubby feet in Jesus' footsteps because we know that this is the most meaningful path we can walk. And if we are so blessed, we might look over our shoulder and discover that because of our legacy of faithfulness, there are those undertaking the journey for themselves.