

Revelation 7:9-17

Matthew 5:1-12

1 John 3:1-3

“Taste and see that the Lord is good.  
Those who take refuge in God  
will not be condemned.” AMEN!

Today, the Gospel of Matthew gives to us  
9 “blessed’s” and 1 “rejoice.”

One of Matthew’s goals is to tell  
his Jewish audience that Jesus is  
the “New Moses.”

He went up a mountain, too!

Moses went alone and received  
the 10 Commandments.

Jesus, like Moses, went up a mountain  
but brought a crowd of people with him  
and he gave a sermon.

This part of it, we affectionately call the Beatitudes.

And talk about getting your audience’s attention!

In poetic cadence and rhythmic song,  
we hear Jesus bring something to a  
crowd of people that had little reason to  
be optimistic.

They were folks from Galilee.

A region that was outside  
the mainstream of popularity.

It was not an intellectual center nor  
did they have any political power, but Galilee  
did have *something*.

In Galilee, were people with  
different ethnic backgrounds and they  
were living there together in community.

They were diverse in terms of culture and religion.

Where we may see that as a good thing.

Unfortunately, people in powerful places didn't  
and they used it against the Galileans.

They were called not good enough,  
not "Jewish" enough, not pure enough.

The real/regular people didn't despise diversity,  
but the powerful did, and since they  
had the megaphone their insults and  
treachery infected other people's minds

and soon even some of the real/regular people became persecutors.

So, Jesus pulled the ones that were forced to the margins together, brought them up a mountain, and he gave them something the powerful didn't want to give them.

Jesus gave them hope.

He spoke to the hopeless and addressed their realities of poorness, grief, meekness, and hunger.

He spoke to them about mercy, pureness of heart, peacemaking, he acknowledged that persecution occurs when folks like them do the right (or just) thing, and then he said "rejoice!"

For that's what happened to the prophets.

What a way to kick off a sermon!

Today, on this day of remembrance, his words from the Sermon on the Mount sound different to us.

Some of us may be encountering social misfortune and/or poverty and some of us may be socially accepted and economically stable or even better than stable.

Most of us are not being persecuted for following Jesus.

But, like Galilee, there's this kind of diversity among us and powerful people might not like it.

A diversity that makes us susceptible to persecution.

So, what effect is this text having on us? (Pause)

Last week, when the bishop was here, he spoke to us about the way St. Stephen is active in ministry in Tallahassee and that

we give to the Florida Bahamas synod our tithe and the synod office does active ministry with over 180 present and new congregations.

The bishop's office is involved in conversations with political leaders of the state to utilize their powers in the teachings of Jesus.

The bishop then told us that the synod office

sends their tithe, about 50% of  
the congregational benevolences,  
to the larger ELCA office in Chicago

where Bishop Eaton and her staff  
dialogue policy and matters of justice  
to United State's Presidents and  
Congressional leaders.

His point, was that we are part of something very big.

As a congregation within the ELCA,  
we are part of a network that tries to live out  
the 9 "blessed's" and 1 "rejoice,"  
that kick off Jesus' sermon.

And this is a hope I often forget.

Why do we forget? Is it our humanity?  
Is it the devil? Both?

I don't know, but I do know  
what it means to remember.

Especially on this day of remembrance,  
we need to know that we are not alone.

Remember it, taste and feel it.

We are diverse in many ways but  
uniquely the same when it comes  
to experiencing death.

Live long enough, then you will encounter  
what it feels like to lose someone you love.

It can be a hard truth to swallow.

It may feel like a dark cloud, a storm,  
a drowning, a loneliness...

but let me assure you, as I was assured  
and led to remember.

You're not drowning and you're not alone.

You are part of something bigger.

You are a vital member of this community and  
the larger one that bishop spoke about,  
but even more, you are a child of God...  
you can go on! (Pause)

In Revelation 7, we read about  
a great multitude that no one was able to count.

In that multitude was every nation,  
all tribes and peoples and languages were there.

They gather and sing with palm branches and  
they're robed in God's glory.

(Palm branches were the Greek symbol of victory.)

What a victory, indeed.

There are names we know who  
are among the great multitude.

People we love and people we struggled  
with are counted in the multitude.

There are Jewish and Palestinian names,  
Russian and Chinese names.

Names we know and names we don't know  
are there and we are part of them,  
just as they are part of us. (Pause)

Even as we cry, we are permitted  
to celebrate in victory.

It is God that will wipe away every tear.

It is the person next to you,  
wherever you are,  
who will place a hand upon your shoulder

and yours upon theirs.

It is a love that you can see around the throne,  
and a love that you can see, right here  
and right now, if you look (just look)  
and remember.

“See the love the Father has given.”

A love that call us children of God. (Pause)

AMEN!