Daniel 7:1-3,15-18 Luke 6:20-31 Ephesians 1:11-23

"Sing praise to the Lord with a new song
and let the faithful exult in glory." AMEN!

It's notable, I think, that Luther's Reformation
began on the eve of All Saints Day.

Scholars consider that the Reformation
began on October 31st, 1517.

508 years ago when Luther did that
church door nailing, thing.

And All Saints Day (Nov. 1) is a moment for us
to highlight the unity of all believers.

October 31, as you know, is also Halloween,
a word that comes for "All Hallows' Eve"
which literally means the evening
before All Saints' Day.

All this to say that we have shared origins
rooted around our tradition of All Saints Sunday.

The best part of this All Saints Sunday is that
we come to recognize that we are not
conquering victors -
but instead are like "beads on a string,"
as Robertson Davies wrote.

“Let us behave with decency to the beads
that were strung before us, and hope
modestly that the beads that come after us

will hold us of no account because we are dead…

What might we profitably do on Halloween?

Look backward and consider those
who went before us.

The road ahead is inevitably dark,
but to see where we have been may
offer unexpected hints about who we are
and where we should be heading.

Triviality about the past leads certainly
toward a trivial future.” (Pause)

In other words, the best part of today is
payment of respect for those who have
departed this world, and entered the next.

It is knowing the past is of remarkable importance.

It is also about recognizing where we are going.

In this, we are careful not to overthink it,

become preoccupied by fear, or
aroused to despair, but to contemplate
"the gap of not knowing."

It's a spiritual practice we can learn
from the Buddhist tradition.

That in time, and with practice,
we can find deep concentration and
a settled mind to face the impermanent
nature of our physical bodies.

The practice of letting go begins to
dissipate the everyday irritants, concerns,
desires, and even aversions.

The practice leads us to embrace the day. (Pause)

So, it may seem strange that our gospel
reading today comes from Jesus'
sermon on the level place.

At first glance the only line that seems to
fit the day is "Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh."

But if we can back up a few verses
to verse 17 of chapter 5, we find these words.

“[Jesus] came down with them and
stood on a level place,
with a great crowd of disciples and
a great multitude of people

from all Judea, Jerusalem, and
the coast of Tyre and Sidon.”

Everyone from all cultures were there.

There is nothing trivial about this statement.

Jesus came down to humanity, in all forms, and
spoke a challenging and (sort of)
comforting sermon.

He spoke of the ups and downs of life and
comforted those of us who are poor, hungry
and grieving.

He encouraged those of us who are hated,
and excluded for doing things Jesus did
for there will come a day of great reversal.

Jesus, challenged also.

He warned those of us who are wealthy,
full bellied, and laughing.

Cautioned those of us who like to be
spoken well of and popular for doing things
Jesus did NOT do for there will come
a day of great reversal. (Pause)

We get tangled up in the categories
we assume for ourselves.

Am I a “woe” or a “blessed?”

Sheep or goat; in or out?

But, the truth is, at various times
we might notice we’ve been both.

Jesus challenges our desires to label and
categorize people, and keep them there.

I stand up here week after week as though
I’m the teacher and you all are the student,

but the fact is some of you know more and
could get up here and tell it better than I can.

Ours is not a great arrangement.

See, I’m that white male that has spent
most of his life rich, laughing, and
concerned about popularity.

It's a challenging sermon from Jesus
for people like me, but I want to be better,
do better.

For those who are poor, hungry, and weeping.

For those who have been persecuted and
reviled for following Jesus they'll receive
the great reversal with joy and relief, yet
the challenge to hold on is hard.

It's nice to know dessert is coming,
but when Lord will it be delivered!?! (Pause)

As if sensing this, Jesus shifted his
sermon at verse 27.

It is perhaps Jesus' most stark call issued.

That call, command really, is "Love your enemies."

A remarkable imperative that receives
added emphasis through repetition
a few verse verses later.

For the crowd, his words must have been crushing.

For his way is assuredly not the way

the world operates.

One can imagine the crowd substantially
thinning after Jesus' sermon, a lot like the way
the crowd is substantially
thinning at churches who proclaim

Jesus' message of cross carrying and loving enemies.
(Pause)

Still, it is true… even though the crowd thins.

There are no soft and easy messages from his sermon.

It's the kind of sermon that can get one crucified
by the empire, but on All Saints Sunday,

it is perhaps worth remembering those saints
across the centuries who have dared
to love enemies, even at great personal cost.

Still know this, we are connected to them
like beads on a string.

AMEN!