

ALL SAINTS DAY – Luke 6:20-31

I've always said that it was at my first call that I had the quietest neighbours. You see I lived across the road from hundreds of years of history and plenty of tombstones.

Cemeteries house the dead, but they're for the living. One way to discover how a community or even an entire culture interacts with death is through the sacred tradition of commemorating the saints. In Slovakia, All Saints' Day is a national holiday as well as a religious one. Slovak cemeteries come alive as people adorn their loved ones' tombs with candles, flowers, and other local trinkets. It is typical to see ancient water basins throughout the graveyard, available for visitors to wash the tombstones. All Saints Day is also a family affair where all generations learn about their heritage while facing their own mortality and understanding their own sainthood through baptism.

The text for today confuses me some. Jesus says to the disciples, these are the people who are blessed by God: the poor, for theirs is the kingdom ; the hungry, for they will be filled; those who weep, for they will laugh; those who are hated, excluded, reviled and have defamed you in the name of the Son of Man. "Rejoice...leap for joy...for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what your ancestors did to the prophets. (Pause)

What did the disciples really hear? This is what I hear Jesus saying: I am being bombarded by all you crowds and disciples. You are already blessed. Don't worry so much. When you think you've lost everything I will be there. I know you are hungry. You are blessed and ready for the Holy meal. When you cry openly as you follow Christ, joy will be with

you. When people get too close to you and are breathing down your neck because you are a follower it only means that they're bothered by the Son of Man and truth will protect you. //

Then Jesus shifts gears: Woe to the rich, you have received your consolation; those that are full, for they will be hungry; those who are laughing for they will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

What Jesus is saying is this: "if you've got it made, that's all you're gonna get. If you think you're perfect, you're wrong. That kind of attitude will only get you so far. And if you think life is all fun and games just know there's suffering and it will appear. Don't live for the approval of others, doing what indulges them. Popularity only gets you so far. Look at where it got the false prophets?"

No matter what side of the room each person ends up on, Jesus gives them all, as he does us) an opportunity to follow him. He says, "Listen. I'm talking to all of you now. We all deserve new life. If you're ready for the truth hear this, "Love your enemies. We don't always get along. Let them bring out the best in you. When someone upsets you pray for them. If someone slaps you in the face just take it. If someone grabs your shirt wrap up your coat too. No more payback. Live generously" (The Message).

No matter where we think we might fit in - blessed or "woed" - one thing is certain. Jesus does not want us to sit around, box up our faith, afraid to speak the truth of God's love. Remember on this All Saints Sunday, God has adopted us at baptism, claimed us as his own child, a saint of his kingdom. Today we remember the saints that have gone before us. They have blessed our lives and will be a blessing in the future.

Recently I read a book by Susan Cain called "Bittersweet". In it Susan tells us a sad story about Min Kim, an accomplished violinist and a stolen Stradivarius violin. Perhaps some of you have heard this story before. Min Kim is a grown adult now, but growing up was not easy. Min was a child always in the spotlight. She started playing violin at six, skipping lightly from lesson to lesson, learning in weeks the scales and sonatas where it took others years to master. At seven she was the youngest student ever to be accepted to London's prestigious Purcell School for Young Musicians; at eight, she was told she'd outgrow her adult teacher within the year; by thirteen she made her debut with the Berlin Symphony Orchestra; at sixteen, the legendary Ruggiero Ricci said she was the most talented violinist he had ever taught. Later he instructed her for free saying he would learn as much from her as he from him, and it would be wrong to take payment.

The effort and dedication to reach such heights at such a young age was outstanding. She gave up her childhood. Her family had to move out of South Korea to London for her to continue her studies. Her gift of music was beauty to the world.

Then at the age of 21 a violin dealer presented a gift. A three hundred year old Stradivarius violin for 450 pounds. It was a steal. She knew it was the one. She remortgaged her flat and it became her everything. She guarded it with her life. Until one day it was stolen. She was sitting having a tea in a coffee shop in London's Euston Station and set her Stradivarius down beside her. Before she could sip from her tea the Strad was gone. The news hit worldwide. Scotland Yard got involved. In the end it was found three years later. She had

stopped playing violin altogether by that time because life as she knew it, married to her Stradivarius, would never be the same.

One day Susan met up with Min (they had become good friends after Susan reviewed Min's book "Gone"). They met in Cremona the town where Stradivari worked and which is still the unofficial heart and soul of the world's violin lovers. They toured the Museo del Violino (Museum of Violins) listened to the audio tour only to come to the end and a row of priceless violins in plastic cases on the walls. Min looked and ran out as fast as she could. When they got outside, breathing heavily she said, "That's a torture chamber in there. They have silenced the beautiful life out of the instruments."

Music. Life. Joy....Life throws so much at us. Life gives us joy in new birth. Life gives sadness in death but new life in resurrection. The faith within us isn't meant to be boxed up in our hearts like the violins. Exactly the opposite. Jesus invites us to love our enemies. That means loving everyone as you would want to be loved. Love is transformational.

We come together today to give thanks to God for the love he showed us through our his son Jesus Christ. We give thanks for the love he showed our family and friends who have passed. In death the saints that have gone before us are examples of how to live our lives in freedom. In baptism we've been marked by the seal of the Holy Spirit and made a child of God, a new saint, one sent to proclaim his love.

Listen. Remember Jesus gives us the command, "Love your neighbours as yourself." Don't silence your faith! Share it with all. In Jesus name. Amen.