Shine Like the Saints

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
Rev. Mary Koon
November 1, 2026
Matthew 5: 1–12

Prayer – Shine in our hearts, O God, and reveal your love through the scripture read and word proclaimed. Silence in us any voice but your own, that we might listen and grow as your disciples. AMEN

This morning we will meet Jesus near the start of his ministry on a hill by the Sea of Galilee, preaching and teaching. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus has already amassed quite a following, he is healing the sick, curing disease, casting out demons, and proclaiming the Good News.

The text we will read is known as the Beatitudes, a word that means blessings. It feels really important that when Jesus starts preaching, according to Matthew, he begins with divine blessing, God's gracious love poured out upon humanity, particularly those who suffer, giving them a word of consolation and hope and truth. Blessing is where we begin.

Matthew 5:1–12

> When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. [2]Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:
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> [3]'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
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> [4]'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
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> [5]'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

[6]‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

[7]‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

[8]‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

[9]‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

[10]‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[11]‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[12]Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.
AMEN

The beatitudes are the traditional scripture that has been read on All Saints Day since the medieval period. The blessings Jesus describes were seen as promise, consolation, and affirmation of holiness.

Early Christians honored martyrs on this day, those who died for their faith, but the Apostle Paul used the term “saints” to mean all believers who are sanctified in Christ (1 Corinthians 12). And this is how we think today. All Saints Sunday sets aside a time to recognize in worship those who have gone before us and whose lives and stories hold a special place in our hearts. We may grieve their loss, even while we give thanks for their lives...grief and gratitude...a little like a divine dance.

As many of you know, I coach girls on the Run at Normandale Hills Elementary School. We run laps around the field behind the school, which is elevated and has one of the best views in Bloomington because you can see for miles! Above the trees is the Emerald city skyline of

Minneapolis. As one does, a few weeks ago I struck a "Down Dog" pose, essentially looking upside down through my legs... just for fun. And whoa, how different the city looked, with the skyscrapers pointing toward the earth, and the trees and clouds trading places. It was a little disorienting.

And I wonder if this is how Jesus' first listeners felt when he claimed that, instead of the conventional understanding that the rich are the blessed ones, it's actually the poor who are blessed. Instead of the arrogant blow-hards that seem to take and take, really, in God's kin-dom, the meek ARE blessed. Those that stir up trouble and force their way... nope, in God's realm, it's the peacemakers who are blessed. He takes old wisdom and turns it on its head. You are blessed when you grieve, for you will be comforted. Jesus reveals the very heart of God. He shows us who God is and that God's desire is for the well-being of all, especially those who are suffering.

We do not want to simplify these words of Jesus by treating them as imperatives for how we can live a blessed, spiritual or even "saintly" life. These are all declarative statements. They are not transactional... as in, do this and you will be blessed. It's simply NOT the way God works.

God begins with blessing.

We have received God's providential care in many ways, and in some ways the world is waaayyy better than in Jesus' time, but it is also true that God's will on earth has not yet fully manifested throughout creation. Matthew expresses that with two sides of his sentences... Blessed are the meek, for instance, and the blessing appears in the future tense... for they will see the kingdom of God.

Jesus reminds us that God's blessings are among us already, surprising and counterintuitive, gracious and undeserved, world turning and

beautiful, and we're called to live lives that are responsive to those blessings at every turn. We are co-creators of this blessing by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can give comfort, and mercy; we can come alongside the poor and hurting and treat others as God's children. That's what "all saints" do.

Years ago, I heard the most wonderful definition of a saint. A saint isn't a perfect person, or somehow better or more holy than others. A saint is like a stained-glass window, someone who lets Christ's light shine through them.

I love that so much I'm going to say it again. A saint is like a stained-glass window, someone who lets the light of Christ shine through them.

We are blessed that our sanctuary has beautiful stained-glass windows, art that was created with glass form Germany, designed and crafted by Michael Pilla. Each week we come to worship, or join in online, we are surrounded by these windows whose colors, all found in God's glorious creation, are reflected in the pews and on the faces of all the saints in the pews.

For those of you who are new to Oak Grove, or maybe have forgotten about the symbolism of these windows, on this All Saints Day, I want to share just a little bit of the history and meaning behind these beauties, because they, too, have a story.

When I arrived in 2011, the huge window above the cross was finished as was the window by the banner. Generous donations allowed for these windows to be designed and installed. We were simply waiting for more funds to finish the windows. But then a dear saint, now gone to the church triumphant, used her legacy giving to fund the remainder of the windows. She wanted to give her planned donation before her death in order to enjoy the windows in her older age. And she did, and it was a

gift. The windows are artwork, and therefore we'll all see different things. But here is what we know about the windows.

The Lantern-stained glass above the cross compels our eyes upward. The large piece's design symbolizes the relationship between God and humanity and our liberation in Christ through the empty cross. The 12 multicolored jewels that circle down and rise up are symbolic of the calling of the 12 disciples, each bestowed with a gift to share with the world by the Holy Spirit. The design emphasizes that each person's calling is empowered and radiant. We are all uniquely gifted and we all matter. Circles are used as an expression of the perfection of God and the unending nature of God's eternal love. You'll see that there are broken circles with lines through them, and they symbolize the imperfection of human beings, but acknowledge the divine within us all. The lines that are not straight signify that while we each follow our own paths, the same life force, the empowering Spirit of God is within us all.

The windows on each side of the sanctuary were inspired by the community of Oak Grove and the tradition of the Presbyterian church. Each window represents a tree within a grove of trees, each one in the canopy being diverse and complex. There are "cupped hands" that embrace these treetops and offer them in praise and prayer. The interplay of round, square and organic lines meandering is reminiscent of how different we all are, yet we can come together as God's community, serving, praying, worshipping. At the base of the windows you will see three intertwined circles, a symbol for the trinity and hidden within them, three fish each. The fish that are deep in the design are a reminder of Jesus calling the fishermen away from their nets in Luke 5, to follow him. (It doesn't say in our literature, but the fish was one of the earlier symbols of being a Christ follower.) Woven with the trinity symbol are root-looking glass reminding us that our faith is rooted in

Christian values and beliefs and that our action grows from these fundamental beliefs.

Rooted and grounded in God's blessing, we are surrounded by the saints whose light continues to shine upon us and encourages our light to shine.

Before we honor those who have died this year, I want to give you all a moment to think about the saints in your lives, those who shine Christ's light. We are going to do what Fred Rogers did back in 1997 as he was honored with a daytime Emmy award for his work on Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. Upon receiving the award, he acknowledged that lots of people helped him come to that night, some who were in the audience, others who were far away, and some in heaven. Each one of us, too, has someone (or someones) who loved us into being. So, we're going to take 20 seconds right now to remember those who have blessed you, who have helped you become who you are, those people who wanted the best for you. Take this time to think of their faces, their voices, their stories.

Ready? (Allow time for quiet reflection)

Thanks be to God. AMEN