

## To Be a Saint

Luke 6:20-31

Her given name was Rose Terry, but she preferred that everyone just call her Terry. She loved crystals and angels and anything low carb. She had a streak of hippie left in her long past the 1970s and read her young grandchildren the book *The Rainbow Man*. She discovered the Internet and online dating before they were a thing, and she dove into new trends headfirst, without reservation.

Eccentric is one word to describe her, but big-hearted, sensitive, and generous also come to mind. She had the home that always had enough beds and another space at the Thanksgiving dinner table if someone, stranger or friend, needed a place to land for a while. She expected the best of everyone and erred on the side of trusting too much, which sometimes got her into trouble. She believed that everyone's story deserved to be heard, and she always had time to listen.

My grandmother Terry is one of the saints, I am sure, and I imagine you can think of some saints who have touched your own life by deed or example. In the church, we go so far as to delineate huge lists of special individuals who have served God in myriad ways. Some we know well--St. John the Baptist, for instance, and Mother Teresa--and others not--Sarah Hale, who advocated for women's ministry and education and nationalized the Thanksgiving holiday. What is beautiful about All Saints' Day when it comes around each year is its recognition that each human being has a unique role to play in building God's kingdom. We read the names of all loved ones who have died in the previous year to honor their lives. Whether or not they achieved fame and glory in this world, their contribution to God's work matters and cannot be measured as more important or less important; it is all good and holy. On this special day the church also baptizes new members and welcomes them into the fellowship

of the saints. This is a day about beginnings and endings, life and death, the full arc of God's narrative.

I mention Terry not only because I love my grandmother (although that certainly is the case) but because I think she is such a stunning example of the richness of God's expression through human lives. Each one of us is God's hands and feet in the world, and God works in all kinds of bodies: big bodies, little bodies, fully abled bodies, special needs bodies, old bodies, young bodies, gregarious bodies, shy bodies, serious bodies, playful bodies. This diversity only begins to give us a glimpse of God's colorful, multi-faceted nature.

The more we learn about the somewhat motley, unusual crew of God's saints, the more we must check ourselves when we think we know who is among the holy. Several Christian memoirists have recently gained attention because of their unlikely narratives: Anne Lamott and Nadia Bolz Weber write about their checkered pasts, their tattoos and dreadlocks and addiction issues, and their roads to faith. One is a faithful servant in her church and the other is now a Lutheran pastor. God works in all kinds of bodies.

Blessed are the poor, the hungry, the mourning. These are Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Plain which appears in Luke (and again in Matthew's Sermon the Mount). We hear these words differently depending on our circumstances. For those of us who are not poor or hungry or mourning, this decree may sound like an indictment. Luke makes no bones about the fact that Jesus calls for a reversal. It is not simply that those who have nothing will one day no longer be wanting, it is quite literally that those who have nothing will receive everything. In order for them to receive everything, the privileged will be left with nothing. There will be winners and there will be losers; everyone does not enjoy a happily ever after.

For many of those who do not have enough, the Sermon on the Plain is the summation of the gospel. Jesus brings hope and healing, not simply in a spiritual sense but a very physical sense. Some poor Latin American communities have documented their Bible studies, and the transcripts from these gatherings show how the participants intensely identify with the poor and oppressed under the first century Roman regime. Jesus validates their experiences and makes them holy. His words and actions documented over the course of the gospels affirm that the Latin American poor bear God's image as much as anyone else--more so, in fact, because God has a heart especially for the least among us.

For those blessed by today's world, the directive is less welcome. We cannot successfully explain away Luke's extreme language, nor do I think we should try. Jesus' message is provocative and intended to raise our hackles. Yet we should always bear in mind that the gospels were written to a particular people and in a particular time and place. Would Jesus speak in exactly the same way today? We find the answer to that question through prayer and study and conversation with each other, and we keep wrestling. The question is never closed. Jesus' challenge of inequality still proves deeply relevant to twenty-first century culture.

Jesus does not, however, end with a rebuke but a charge.

Whether we take away a message of condemnation or hope--or both--let us not overlook the crux of Jesus' discourse. It's the lesson shot through the Bible again and again, and a theme which appears in many of the world's major religions and philosophies. The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Or, we might know the rule as "Love your neighbor as you love yourself." An implication of that statement is that we all know how to love ourselves. If we are ensconced in our own self-loathing, we cannot love others well. First and foremost, we must recognize ourselves as the beautiful pieces of creation that God wonderfully made. It is out of that connection to God and self that we can

then broaden our sights to our families and friends and neighbors and strangers and enemies.

That, my brothers and sisters, is what binds together all the saints: love of God, self, and others.

## **Daniel 7:1-3,15-18**

In the first year of King Belshazzar of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head as he lay in bed. Then he wrote down the dream: I, Daniel, saw in my vision by night the four winds of heaven stirring up the great sea, and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. As for me, Daniel, my spirit was troubled within me, and the visions of my head terrified me. I approached one of the attendants to ask him the truth concerning all this. So he said that he would disclose to me the interpretation of the matter: "As for these four great beasts, four kings shall arise out of the earth. But the holy ones of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom for ever—for ever and ever."

## **Psalm 149 Page 807, BCP**

### *Cantate Domino*

1

Hallelujah!

Sing to the LORD a new song; \*  
sing his praise in the congregation of the faithful.

2

Let Israel rejoice in his Maker; \*  
let the children of Zion be joyful in their King.

3

Let them praise his Name in the dance; \*  
let them sing praise to him with timbrel and harp.

4

For the LORD takes pleasure in his people \*  
and adorns the poor with victory.

5

Let the faithful rejoice in triumph; \*  
let them be joyful on their beds.

6

Let the praises of God be in their throat \*

and a two-edged sword in their hand;

7

To wreak vengeance on the nations \*  
and punishment on the peoples;

8

To bind their kings in chains \*  
and their nobles with links of iron;

9

To inflict on them the judgment decreed; \*  
this is glory for all his faithful people.

### **Ephesians 1:11-23**

In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put

all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

### **Luke 6:20-31**

Jesus looked up at his disciples and said:

"Blessed are you who are poor,  
for yours is the kingdom of God.

"Blessed are you who are hungry now,  
for you will be filled.

"Blessed are you who weep now,  
for you will laugh.

"Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

"But woe to you who are rich,  
for you have received your consolation.

"Woe to you who are full now,  
for you will be hungry.

"Woe to you who are laughing now,  
for you will mourn and weep.

"Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets

"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you."