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Feast of All Saints
2 November 2014
Grace-Trinity Lutheran Churches, Wichita
Revelation 7:2-17; Mt 5:1-12

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

Shortly, the names of our faithful departed will be read and commemorated with all the Saints.

Some of these names we know better than others—

some we still think about every waking moment, others we've already started to forget.

Some names will cause the tears we thought we had under control to flood back full force.

Some names we rejoice over at a life well-lived and now, well-rested.

But all the names are ours, from *this* congregation,

and so we mourn.

We mourn over the fact that these are just the names from *this* congregation.

How many more congregations are reading their own names?

How many have been taken from us?

How many names are now listed with all the Saints?

And how many tears have been shed?

How many have been left poor in Spirit?

How many meek, how many hungry and thirsty for righteousness?

How many are angry?

How many have cried out that it's not fair—it's too soon—it's not right!

And with the reading of such names, and the remembrance of so many deaths,

we can't help but to consider how many more names are still to come—

the names that might be read from next year's list.

Thinking of such things leaves little room for joy, let alone happiness.

And yet that's what the little word means in today's Gospel: *blessed, or, happy are those...*

How can that be?

How can there be blessedness and happiness in the midst of such suffering and despair?

Have you heard of Brittany Maynard?

Her video went viral on FB and other social media—

her story was covered in all the major papers and news outlets.

She's a young girl—just a couple years younger than me—diagnosed with terminal brain cancer.

She went through her bucket list and lived as if there literally wouldn't be many tomorrows.

This story isn't new, except that her video is a plea for what's called *death with dignity*.

She wants to have the choice to end her life—

and, having been told in April that she'd have at most 6 months—

the day she said she'd end her life was yesterday.

Thankfully, however, she hasn't—at least, not yet.

As she says, she still laughs, and feels well enough to go another day.

Lord, have mercy on Brittany!

Brittany's not alone.

There are many others like her:

those with brain cancer, or lung cancer, or colon cancer,
or any of the other cancers that rob us of being us.

Another woman very similar to Brittany is Maggie Karner,
the wife of Pastor Kevin Karner.

She too has terminal brain cancer.

She too has been given only so long to live.

But unlike Brittany, Maggie sees this life of suffering for what it is: *not the end*.

Unlike Brittany, who's only comfort is whether she feels well enough for the day,

Maggie has heard and believes what we call the *beatitudes*—
the blessed is the one, happy are those.

There is no death with dignity.

Death isn't the way it's supposed to be.

It's not part of our Lord's good creation,

and, thanks be to God, it's not going to be a part of His recreation!

So-called death with dignity isn't actually about comforting the dying; it's about power.

It's about not being able or willing to give up control.

And if life is about control, what could possibly be more terrifying than an out-of-control death?

Brittany's message isn't about freedom, it's about power and control—

and letting man stand at the center of it all.

But with the names we'll read, with Maggie, and with all the Saints who've gone on to glory—
who are already clothed in white and standing around the throne—

we praise and bless God that the man standing at the center of it all is not me,
but the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

With such a God who became Man for us in Christ, we have no fear of losing control—

for everything is already safely in His blood-stained hands.

Both life and death, the suffering of this present age as well as all the joys—

everything rests in His hands.

That's Maggie's hope, and that's ours as well.

No matter how hard things seem, no matter how dark and depressing, no matter how hopeless—

nevertheless, we have the promise of Christ: *Blessed are you*.

Blessed are you—

not because you've felt bad enough, or done anything remarkable enough,
or because you've made a name for yourself, or haven't—

but *blessed are you* because your name is written in the Lamb's book of life!

Blessed are you because you've had your filthy robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb!

Blessed are you because you've dined on Lamb's High Feast for the forgiveness of all your sin!

Blessed are you—not because of what you've done or not done—
but because of what Christ has done *for you!*

And what He has done for you He has done for all His Saints.
He's born their flesh and carried their sorrow.
He's suffered their depression and cried out with their pain.
He's been shamed with their shame and beaten with their own blows.
In fact, He even suffered the *little* death—
the one Brittany fears,
the one that took each of the names we'll read in a moment,
the one that seems so empty, so final, so lonely—
and in suffering that little death, Christ defeated the *greater* death,
trampling down death by His death,
and emptying death of its power and claim over you.

Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord because by His death, the Church lives.
She lives with all the Saints—
the baptized gathered here,
and all those who gather on the other side of the veil.

It may seem a bit depressing—reading the names of those who've died from this congregation—
but let not your hearts be troubled, for none are lost from this congregation!

In fact, they're still counted among our number.
They're still gathered around the throne.
They still dine at the heavenly banquet.
They still sing—in fact, likely with more gusto than ever before!
And they're still with us, and we with them, with all the Saints, for we all are in Christ.

He is the *blessed one*.
And so His is the kingdom of Heaven;
in Him there's comfort;
He inherits the earth;
He is satisfied;
He has received mercy;
He sees God the Father;
and so He is called the Son of God.

Blessed be the Lord, the eternal Son of the Father, who has suffered all that is ours,
that we might rejoice in all that is His.

*Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you
falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they
persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mt 5:11-12)*

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