

**The Only Blessing That Matters**  
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**Bloomington, Indiana**

**All Saints Sunday, Year A**  
**Text: Matthew 5:1-12**

I'm not sure I ended the conversation with grace and gravitas. Maybe it was because I still had a tiny baby at home. A baby still waking up two or three times a night. I ran into an acquaintance who knew that that tiny baby had been in the NICU, but didn't know how things had worked out. I was only too happy to tell her about how that tiny baby was home and healthy, and, it seemed, with few complications of her harrowing beginning. "We're so lucky," I said. "No," my acquaintance said, "You're so BLESSED. You're a Christian, you should know the difference." I'm not sure I ended that conversation with grace and gravitas. Word to the wise: don't correct people who are trying to make sense of a traumatic situation. (Or new mothers.) It isn't up to you to make sense of their situation, that is their work. And it is very important work. But, really, what is the difference between lucky and blessed? Honestly, I think we use lucky and blessed interchangeably because we don't understand what blessed means. We use both words to mean, "things worked out well for me. Things followed the story I wanted them to follow. I got what I wanted." But that isn't what blessed means. The only real blessing lies in blessing others.

Part of the problem is that we have become invested in a story that is a pure fiction. The story is something about having everything we need, living in a good neighborhood, having two and a half kids that get straight As, go to a good college, have a lovely family of their own, and who care for us when we grow old. This is what it means to be blessed. Which also means if your life doesn't follow that story, you're not blessed. Even when we stretch that story to include other versions, there are still a whole host of people - *faithful people* - people who by choice or by fate have stories that look different and are somehow unable to claim the blessing. The mamas whose adult children's death made national news, the transgendered person who just want to use the bathroom, the families who have the suicide hotline memorized, the kids with IV poles instead of skates, the people who aren't even going to stand in a SHORT line to vote because, they feel, what's the point? Our romance with a blessed storyline leaves a lot of people out. Actually, it leaves everyone out. No one follows this line perfectly. And yet, today, the church proclaims us saints for no other reason than that we were baptized. Saints aren't saints because their lives follow some #blessed storyline. Saints are saints because their lives are a part of God's storyline. Their blessing doesn't lie in what they were able to secure for themselves, but in what God secured for them through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

So when this same person - Jesus - sits down on a mountainside to teach, he has something to say about what blessing means. He begins "Blessed are..." Of course, for us, 2000 years later, this text, the Beatitudes, suffers from familiarity. Familiarity may breed contempt in some circles, but when it comes to biblical texts used in worship, familiarity drains the text of its transformative power. Blessed are the poor in spirit...yeah, yeah, I get it. But we forget that we would NOT list the poor in spirit as blessed. Rather, we would say blessed are the people who can afford #blessed throw pillows from Target. Blessed are the people whose lives are working out as they planned. Blessed are the people who post happy voting pictures on Facebook right after they post pictures of how well hybrid school is going. Right? But Jesus is saying something else. Translators and commentators say this word "blessed" means happy, fortunate, favored: happy are the grieving? Really? Favored...are the depressed? Fortunate...are those down on their luck? The blessed are the ones whose lives *don't* follow the script; who *aren't* lucky; who *don't* get a big break. They're the ones who have given up on trying to secure a blessing for themselves because they're just trying to get by. At the end of the day, I don't think Jesus is saying the poor in spirit are blessed because they are poor in spirit. I think Jesus is actually blessing their lives, and inviting us in to the act. The only real blessing lies in blessing others.

In his book *Telling Secrets*, Frederick Buechner tells a story about St. Brendan the Navigator who spent his life looking for Paradise. Brendan and his disciple Finn and a one-legged monk named Gildas meet one night. As Gildas reaches for his cane, he stumbles and Brendan catches him. "I'm as crippled as the dark worlds," Gildas said. "If it comes to that, which one of us isn't, my dear?" Brendan said. Finn, the narrator, recounts the moment like this: "Gildas with but one leg. Brendan sure he'd misspent his whole life entirely. Me that had left my wife to follow him and buried our only boy. The truth of what Brendan said stopped all our mouths. We was cripples all of us. For a moment or two there was no sound but the bees." Finally, Brendan breaks the silence: "To lend each other a hand when we're falling...Perhaps that's the only work that matters in the end."

We will never find God's blessing by snatching for it nor by hoarding it. The blessing we have is meant to be shared in a way that will bring about God's kin-dom on earth, even for a fleeting moment, right now. That is the only blessing that matters in the end. Amen.