

Saints, Sinners, and Those we meet at the Checkout line

(Based on All Saints' Day, Nov. 1 and Matthew 5:1-12)

It was not the best start to the day. A simple run into the grocery store was turning into a major event. All I needed was sundried tomatoes. They use to be in the vegetable area of Food Basics. Use to be until someone thought they would be better somewhere else. They obviously didn't ask my opinion. They obviously didn't post signs to the new location.

Even the produce person on duty that day didn't know. We began our lost and found game. Aisle 5, aisle 12, aisle 10. It should be here she said. I had been here before on my first and second times through the store. I looked again. These sundried tomatoes were different as I looked closer. Not packaged as dried tomatoes but in a jar and with oil. This didn't seem right. But it was all they had. I made my way to the checkout.

Things were different. Not in the same place. People didn't seem to have answers. Would this work?

Sounds a lot of life. Life in a pandemic for sure. Life in general I would suggest too. The way

forward is not always clear. The simple way can get clouded in a moment -- a death, a job loss, a bad choice. We find ourselves looking for life where it once was and yet it seems to have moved!

Blessed are you...?

I know this may come across like I am mocking you or even myself. It isn't my intention. It is inviting you to consider the road, the path, the run into the store may be understood in the meaning of the word blessing as Jesus uses it in the beatitudes.

Let me explain more.

In our reading from Matthew 5 we heard the beatitudes today. For some of you know these blessings. You learned them in Sunday school. You know them like a good friend. Blessed are you, Jesus said. It was an interesting list if you think about it. Blessed are you who mourn. Blessed are you who are meek. Blessed are you who are poor in spirit. Blessed are you pure in heart.

These blessed people don't seem to be the people who want to make America great again, who are posted all over social media, who are presented at

the movers and shakers of life. It seems like a funny list.

Exactly the point. Jesus was making a statement about where to find the sundried tomatoes called love, meaning, purpose, life. They are not always easily found. So blessed are you who find themselves in aisle 5 realizing you need God in your life or aisle 12 where you are feeling lost from what is most dear to you and aisle 10 where you show people how to cooperate instead of fighting or competing for the last bag of flour. Jesus is saying blessed are you. He is saying you are on the right road to God, reminding us about the journey of faithfulness. Blessed in the beatitudes is used as way of seeing ourselves on the road towards God, on a path of discovery. Blessed are you is saying you are exactly where God can meet you.

Are any of you wanting to put your hand up to Jesus and ask a question? You are in good company for sure. In fact we should be wondering and thinking about what is Jesus going with this? In Matthew's gospel these are basically Jesus' platform to use a political term, these are the tenets of the way God

works in Jesus' mind. It doesn't sound like the leader that the Jewish people were seeking. They had more of a golden era of political stability from Rome in mind. Even Jesus' words had John the Baptist asking are you the one Jesus or is there someone else coming? What Jesus presents for us is a different route through the store of life than many were thinking. If you have questions about the path that would be natural.

Today is All Saints' Day. It is celebrated in the church on Nov. 1. Now if we were to think about saints we would like be thinking spiritual giants, people who have their act together, who always seem to know how to pray and never have any doubts. You would think this would be the definition of a saint, but we may need to hear the beatitudes again. Nadia Bolz-Weber, a former comic, tattooed Lutheran priest who lives in Denver, Colorado wrote a book called *Accidental Saints* subtitled *Finding God in all the wrong people*.

She shares, "...it has been my experience that what makes us the saints of God is not our ability to be saintly but rather God's ability to work through

sinners. The title “Saint” is always conferred, not earned. Or as the good Saint Paul puts it, “For it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for [God’s] good pleasure (Philippians 2:23). I have come to realize that all the saints I have known have been accidental ones – people who inadvertently stumbled into redemption like they were looking for something else at the time, people who have just a wee bit of a drinking problem and manage to get sober and help others do the same, people who are as kind as they are hostile.” P. 7

She was reflecting on these words as she thinking about the annual All Saints Day where they collected items and names of people they considered saints in the past, in their community, church etc. She offered one such saint was a woman who started a church in 1909. She was so inspired by this woman’s efforts and then she found out she was also a racist, anti-everybody and hostile to immigrants. She wasn’t sure she could hold the title of saint and yet there was the church still going, a woman founder in the face of sexism. She had to wrestle with the saint.

She goes on to say, “what we celebrate in the saints is not their piety or perfection but the fact that we believe in a God who gets redemptive and holy things done in this world through, of all things, human beings, all of whom are flawed.”

She reflected a little more to realize that if God could use flawed people it left her realizing God could use her in the role she finds herself as a priest even if seems like an ill-fitted role for her, her past, and her mistakes.

Blessed are you...

You are on the right road.

It interesting as one of the commentators on the beatitudes shared if blessed is being on the right road with God, on a journey of faithfulness, we are also being called to awareness of the companions on the way.

In many ways today that is what all saints’ is about. We are remembering those who have been on the highway, the path, the journey. We recall their joke about a Sweet Marie bar. We recall the laughter that led to tears. We recall the meals shared and the

company spent. We remember them helping us face our fears to volunteer at the Soup Kitchen. We recall the one who listened in our confusion. Who came home at just the right time again. Saints can sometimes look like sinners. Sinners take on the form of saints. And sometimes they are someone you meet at the checkout line at the grocery store.

As I telling the checkout person the answer to their question did you find everything you were looking for today and explained the trip down aisle 5 12 and 10. How I wondered if I had the right sundried tomatoes, the person line behind me said. I use that all the time. It works just fine. A fellow traveller confirmed that my journey led me to where I need to go and found sometimes that would help me be fed.

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

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. Amen.