

Feast of All Saints: Revelation 7:9-17, Psalm 34:1-10, 22, 1 John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12

In just a few minutes, we will move from the pews to the font for Cate's and Emily's baptisms. The end of October and first days of November—with celebrations of Halloween, All Saints and All Souls—are often seen as a thin space where the separation between heaven and earth seems to be very slender; when angels, saints and ancestors—all those who form a great cloud of witnesses—are acknowledged as being present with us.

We are gathering around the font twice this morning—at 8:00 (for Cate) and 10:30 (for Emily), so this morning begins with knowing that everyone who walks through the doors of St. A.'s today will stand around the font this morning. Gathered with us around that font are all those who have been with us on this journey over the years; all those we have known and loved deeply and all those who have known and loved us deeply; the many witnesses we might not have known personally, but who have somehow impacted our lives; all those who over the past thousands-plus years have shown glimpses of God's generous and life-giving love. That is the expansive, far-reaching, inclusive and unending cloud of witnesses who are with us today. It's quite the crowd that is all here this morning to witness these baptisms. The cloud of witnesses might be present every day, but today, above all days, imagine them and remember them. They are with us every step of the way.

This movement that we are just about to make, from our pews to the font, is a short journey (nonetheless, I encourage us to watch out for one another, to help us all travel safely.) Holy Baptism marks the beginning of a different, rest-of-their-lives journey for Cate and Emily. The font is the trailhead, if you will, for all that comes after, so regardless of how long you have been on the journey, this is a day to orient ourselves. And that's exactly what Jesus's Sermon on the Mount is:—an orientation map. There are so many types of maps: topographical maps, geopolitical maps, family maps, nautical maps, constellation maps, heart-brain-and body maps, blue, red and purple election maps, geological maps, road maps and atlases, etc. The Sermon on the Mount is an orientation map, but it is not like google maps, telling us the most efficient way to get from point A to point B. Or potential hazards or distractions along the way, such as *Watch out for the speed trap! Or, there's a slow down on I-5, but you are still on the fastest route!* If only we were given advance notice on what lies ahead, we could better prepare: *Watch out! Your heart will be broken this week! Take good care, something will knock the breath out of you and shake the foundations of your world!* Sometimes I wish the Sermon on the Mount were the type of map that clearly showed the way around life's hardest circumstances. It isn't that type of map, though, but rather an orientation to the Kingdom Heaven and the ways of God.

And what stands out in this orientating gospel, once again or maybe for the first time, is that the ways of God begin with blessing. The Source of Life (aka the Font of Life) bubbles with blessing and extends blessing and then continues to bless—all the time, all around. The blessing isn't just for some and not for others, just present in good times, and not at other times. The blessing is at the heart of all God does—of how God works—but perhaps even more important, the blessing is at the heart of who God is.

The blessing might even be God's very breath. God breathes in (inspires); God breathes out (respires), and God speaks blessing into every nook and cranny of this world: Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those. And blessed are those. And blessed are those. In and out with every breath, this unimaginably big and endless blessing just keeps extending and expanding.

What I love about the Beatitudes, is that if you don't see yourself and others and all of creation embedded in this sermon of blessings, head on over to Jesus's Sermon on the Plain in Luke for more blessings: 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. And blessed are you. And blessed are you. Beyond the Beatitudes, if you do nothing else this morning, start counting the number of times you hear some form of the word *blessing* this morning! It's a little bit like trying to figure out how many jelly beans are in a giant jar. Blessings are everywhere once you start looking for them. From the Psalmist to the author of the Revelation to John, to the hymnists, to the prayers for the candidate, to the prayer of thanksgiving for the waters of baptism, it's all about blessing. The water—the headwaters that are at the trailhead that is the font—is blessed and then poured on the head of the Cate / Emily, who is blessed and is a blessing.

On All Saints, we talk a lot about, well, saints. Thomas Merton once said, "For me, to be a saint, means to be myself." Cate and Emily are soon-to-be welcomed as saints. While this sounds so simple, *we know how challenging it is, how many obstacles we set before ourselves, how many layers of fear and resistance have built over the years* that prevent us, often, from knowing, in our depths, that who we are is the full blessing. (Italicized words come from Christine Valters Paintner, *The Love of Thousands*) Immersion in the waters of baptism (or, a pouring over the head of water) immerses us in a worldview that is filled with blessing. We underestimate the radical and wondrous and dangerous and demanding call of blessing—to see ourselves and one another and, indeed, all of creation as fully Beloved, all revealing the face of God. The Baptismal Covenant is nothing more, nothing less than a reorientation to the One who not only breathes blessing, but who calls us to extend blessing, in and out like breathe, as well. It is now time to go to the font, to the trailhead, to the Source, to re-orient ourselves to the loving, liberating and life-giving ways of God and to sing that blessing to and with Cate and Emily.