

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church, Pinole, CA

Celebration of All Saints ~ November 1, 2020

“Recognizing all are Blessed”

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good Morning and Happy All Saints Day. It feels good to be back in church and we may soon be able to, with some precautions, be back to a real Church Christmas (fingers crossed!) And a special thanks to all those who made this worship service today possible.

I have to admit, I love today's Gospel. I think it is very relevant and hopeful as we consider our stewardship gifts, as we look to the upcoming election results, and as we work through the struggles caused by the pandemic. Today's Gospel gets at the heart of what is happening today.

A few months back, I think, I gave a sermon about the importance of the words we use, and how slang, bad taste for jokes at the expense of others, and not realizing the verbal wounds we cause can be detrimental to honoring a person's dignity. I shared the story of the hospitalized lady with the smeared lipstick whose family had convinced her she had no worth. Words are important.

Today, we move on to the importance of recognition. So here is another story. A couple of nights ago on the news, yes, the usually terrible news, they showed that the city of San Jose was in agreement with the mayor to post large beautiful signs of BLM – black lives matter, at several key San Jose public areas. The letters BLM are tastefully made up of the names of all those that have been killed unjustly due to their color and situation.

Well, that was the story on the news. But then the camera scanned onto this lovely young black woman at a podium. We have had a rough year folks, and even for those of us privileged enough to escape with minimal

life interruption, there is a tiredness. There is always this underlying tiredness that is visible even with a mask. We didn't start out that way, back last April, but we are there today.

But then there was this woman at the podium. Her hair just bursting with curls and color, her face shining, and her eyes gleaming as she stood in front of the Black Lives Matter mural and stated, "We are here. We are seen. We are finally recognized. We are finally human. Thank you, City of San Jose."

I took a breath. It was so clear to see the reflection of the pandemic as more than a medical issue. Now that we all have had our lives infringed upon by rules we have no control over, but that matter in terms of life and death, we can now see our brothers and sisters.

Through the loss of precious life, caught on camera, we have borne witness to the infrastructure that needs change.

For as horrible as our current situation is, it is in God's hands. And that includes us. This is Gospel. This is Good News. When Jesus is on the mount and sees the people and tells them :

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

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

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

And the rest of the reading, he is doing exactly what that BLM sign in San Jose was doing for that young person at the podium. They are being recognized. Jesus was not preaching to the royals, but to the disenfranchised, and those outside of the tradition. He recognized them, and also their need to be seen.

There is no one in the world that has not at some time felt poor in some way, who was grieving loss in some way, did not feel worthy and so on.

Jesus is recognizing that just because we feel that way about ourselves and our situation, does not mean that God feels that way.

Jesus is turning everything upside down. His world under Roman rule had similar struggles and the Jewish temple system was a very patriarchal, and caste-like system.

Jesus is telling us that it doesn't matter what the system, or society says, God says we are blessed. We are, as our Epistle reminds us, "Beloved Children of God." All of us, every one of us, at all times, whether we feel we are worthy or not, is not the issue here. The real message is that we all matter, even the we describe ourselves as "least of".

So as radical as seeing a young person of color at a pulpit proclaiming black lives matter, and finally able to say that she matters, without fear of arrest (at least at that moment) and also to say it in a public square in the news, is exactly what Jesus is doing.

Jesus is, without shame, and probably with shining face, shiny curls, and glowing eyes, proclaiming that we are blessed and we are beloved. And that when we live lives that show we are loved by God, there may be some pushback and some hardship that may leave us in grief, or feeling "less than". But we are not - not in God's eyes.

We have all had those in our lives that proclaimed we were blessed and loved. We have all had loved ones that have guided us on the way: some were family; some were friends, coworkers, some were created family; others had fur, feathers, scales, or shells. They too were, and continue to be, the blessed ones in the eyes of God. And we want to recognize them today.

Our Revelation reading states: “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne,” they will be praising God. Recognizing our Saints today strengthens their love for us, as we strengthen our love for them. For love is all that really matters.

We are blessed no matter what condition we are in. How radical is that? And that is the Gospel.

It is now my time to recognize you. Yes, you, all of you watching this right now and those who may watch at another time. Thank you, I see you, even if you think I don't.

If you have contributed to Christ the Lord Church in any way: with your time, talent, financial gifts, or if you just spend a few moments praying for your church community privately, I recognize you.

I thank you for struggling with mute buttons, and internet connections, with feedback and reset invites. For putting on masks, for sweeping, cleaning, painting, potting, moving, dusting, writing, and more I can't even list. I recognize you, your vestry recognizes you.

We are not in the business of making money, and we really can't say we are in the business of saving souls – I think that is God's work. But we are in the business of sharing the Good News, and that Good News is that we recognize the dignity of every human being, always and everywhere. It is our work that we tell those who are struggling that they are beloved and blessed. To continue to recognize the beloved who went before, and to create more moments where young people's eyes shine because they are finally seen, heard and valued.

Amen.