

November 2, 2025 – Trinity Episcopal Church – All Saints' Sunday

Rev. Elizabeth Molitors

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”
Luke 6:21b

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”
Matthew 5:4

Whenever we read this particular gospel passage that we just heard this morning, I can't help but be transported back in time - some 15 years now - to a preaching conference I attended in Pennsylvania. The theme of the conference was the Beatitudes – the “blessed are” portions of Jesus’ teachings that appear in both Luke's and Matthew's gospels: blessed are the poor and the hungry, the peacemakers and the poor in spirit.

The Beatitudes section of the gospels of Luke and Matthew was read at every worship service throughout the conference — during morning and evening prayer and daily Eucharist — and various seminary professors and experienced clergy took turns preaching their thoughts on what Jesus might have meant by this series of blessings.

With the passage of so much time, I'm afraid I've forgotten a good deal of the particulars of those sermons, but what *has* stayed with me is the work of one of the presenters, a minister and artist named Charles McCollough. Charles did his preaching about the Beatitudes in the form of sculptures, which sat in the center of the sanctuary where we heard all that preaching.

Each of the sculptures was approximately 15 inches square — about the size of a vinyl album cover — and 2 or 3 inches thick. They were made out of clay, terra cotta in color, and left unglazed so that the finish was matte. The sculptures stood upright, on one narrow edge, mounted on a piece of wood which sat atop a turntable or lazy-susan. The turntable was an important part of the presentation, because each piece was meant to be viewed from both sides. One side of the sculpture portrayed the first half of the beatitude — *blessed are the....* — and the other side showed the completion of the thought — *for they shall be...* The figures depicted in the clay weren't quite fully three dimensional; instead they looked like they were emerging from the clay, stepping out to join this world.

The beatitude sculpture which most caught my eye was the one about weeping and mourning, as in, *Blessed are those who weep now*. On the “blessed” side was the profile of a man in mourning, with just his face and his shoulders represented. He was more than sad, more than deeply grieved; the best word I have to describe the look on his face was anguished. His eyes were squeezed shut tight, his cheeks were drawn and hollow, and his mouth was open, and if he could have spoken, I imagine a deep, guttural moan coming out from deep within him. His hands were pictured, too, and what they held was empty space; the artist had cut out of the clay the outline of a head — you could see the forehead and nose, the lips and the chin, and you understood as you looked at the sculpture that this space was the loved one that the man had lost. All he had left was the empty space where the person used to be, and his hands clutched and grasped at nothing.

I sat and studied that anguished man for a long time. A long time. And then it struck me that I'd seen his face before...

It was during the summer when I served as a chaplain at a local hospital, where my primary responsibility was the Emergency Room. As I walked from the parking garage into the back door of the hospital one morning, I looked up and saw a Medivac helicopter on top of the roof – never a good sign. The moment I walked into the chaplain's office, I was sent to emergency, where I learned that a young woman, 18 years old, had been in a serious car accident. As far as the nurse I talked to knew, the girl had come into the hospital still alive, but now she was in surgery, and her prospects weren't very hopeful.

I introduced myself to the girl's aunt and uncle, who were sitting in a waiting room, and then I went out to the lobby to greet the girl's father as he came in. I saw a man come running through the doors, his face the picture of concern and purpose. "Are you Mr. _____?" I asked? He ran toward me, crying out as he did, "Is my little girl dead?" And before I could answer anything about his daughter's condition, the man threw himself in my arms, sobbing almost uncontrollably. His face was anguish – the same face as the man on the sculpture.

Blessed are those who weep now.

I spent most of the day with the man, his family, and many of the man's co-workers – he was a police officer – all of whom arrived as soon as they'd heard the awful news. That same look of anguish showed up over and

over again: when the surgeon delivered the news that the girl had died; when the man first took his daughter's pictures out of his wallet; each time he had to share the news with another relative or friend; when he first saw his daughter's body in a surgery recovery room.

Blessed are those who mourn.

The opposite side of the sculpture I saw at the conference portrayed the second half of the Beatitude, and in this case, I like better the translation of the beatitude in Matthew's gospel, which finishes the blessing about weeping and mourning with a promise that, "they shall be comforted." The clay man's face was still there, but his features had changed and softened. His eyes were still shut, but now they rested gently. His mouth was closed. And while you could still see grief and loss and great sadness in his face, the anguish was gone.

New to the scene was another set of hands; these cradled the weeping man's head, and I understood them to be the hands of God, the source of the man's comfort. The cutout outline of the person that the man mourned still appeared – God's comforting presence hadn't taken away his loss, hadn't restored his absent loved-one – but the way the man's hands regarded the loss had changed. His hands no longer strained and grasped at what wasn't there; instead, they gently caressed and beheld the gift that he had had, in imitation of the hands that now held him.

Blessed are those who weep, for they will be comforted.

Where was the comfort for the father of this 18 year old girl? It would come with time, I supposed, when the rawness of the loss subsided – but the Beatitude says nothing about time, never says that the mourner will have to wait for his comfort.

All throughout that day, we prayed. Together, we said the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary; we prayed the 23rd Psalm and offered spontaneous prayers from our hearts. I trust entirely that God was present in that room, but the face of the grieving father in no way reflected the comfort of God's presence.

Until.

Hours passed and details unfolded about the accident: the exact location, the time, the other vehicles involved. We learned that the young woman's car had been hit by a tanker truck as she exited the highway onto a local road. Understandably, the father raged at each new bit of information – why? how? who could have done such a thing?

And then, at a lull in the conversation, the father asked me if we could pray again. Of course. I began, but soon the father jumped in, and offered prayers for the truck driver – for that person's health and safety, and for deliverance from any guilt or regret that they might now be feeling. He offered up his forgiveness: "I don't know who hit my girl, but I forgive them."

And that's when the shift happened, when the sculpture turned over, when the beatitude changed from being an expression of raw grief and need, and became a blessing. The man continued to grieve, of course – I imagine that not a day has gone by in all of these many years when he hasn't grieved – but something had been transformed.

That act of forgiveness was not about absolving the other driver of responsibility, but about remembering that he or she was almost certainly feeling lost and broken, as well. And in the remembering and being in solidarity of grief with the trucker, the father opened up a space for God's hands, and moved from anguished man to comforted man. Remembering begat change; change begat blessing.

Today we celebrate the feast of All Saints, a day of remembrance. Not just a fond or sad remembrance of those loved ones, those saints, who have died before us, but a remembrance and an acknowledgment of our deep connection and common bond with all humanity: the materially poor and the poor in spirit; those who hunger for food or justice or a sense of belonging; those who mourn and those who feel enmity; those for whom we hold high regard, and those with whom we struggle to see any of the image of God within.

On this day, we're called to remember — hard though it may be — that every one of us is beloved by God, in need of and assured of God's grace and presence and blessings. Each and every one of us, a unique and necessary part of the kingdom vision of love and compassion and justice that God longs to make real, right here, right now.

The poet, Nikita Gill, writes,

*You can walk around pretending
you aren't necessary but the universe
is a poet. And one day the universe
decided that it would sit down and
write you alive, empty stardust into
your veins and make you exist.*

*No wonder you are holding both
a storm and a calm sea inside
that body of yours - and on days
the world overwhelms you, you think
of yourself as more mess, less miracle.*

*It is easy to forget sometimes
that you are a living, breathing
piece of poetry written to defy
all cosmic odds.*

~ Nikita Gill

For this we remember, and we give thanks. *Amen.*