Sermon *Blessed are the Poor in Spirit*
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 11.1.26

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

Happy All Saints Sunday! Our Gospel lesson is what is commonly called The Beatitudes. We read it on All Saints Day because the Beatitudes in many ways represents what it is to live God's will. The saints are examples of people who lived Godly lives.

Sometimes when I mention God's will, I get asked how do we know the will of God? On one hand, God is unknowable and it takes faith to believe; on the other, God leaves fingerprints all around us to see God's will in our lives. One place to see God's fingerprints is in the Beatitudes from Matthew chapter 5.

Here's the setting: The crowd following Jesus was so large he went up a mountain (hill) so that everyone could hear him. What He said has since forth shaped our faith tradition because He talked out our everyday circumstances and the Kingdom of Heaven. The people back then knew of the Roman Empire which I'll call the Kingdom of Ceasar. In that kingdom, people who are "poor in spirit" are looked over, people who mourn are looked down upon, the peacemakers were rounded up for being troublemakers. The meek, the pure in heart, and the merciful were taken advantage of by Ceasar's kingdom. In contrast to that kingdom, Jesus talked about the Kingdom of Heaven. The first thing He said is this:
Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Before I go any farther, let's talk about context and language. Jesus most likely spoke to the people in Aramaic (which is similar to Hebrew). Matthew wrote this Gospel in Greek. Not in English. For us English speakers, we must translate the Greek text into English. (Matthew wrote in Greek because it was a durable language that can withstand the changes in time – which, as you can see, he was correct)

The first word Jesus used, "blessed". There is no direct equivalent in that Greek word in 21st century English. (Transliterated into English) The word is makarios. In Greek, Matthew had two words to choose from for "blessed" – Makarios, as shown, and eulegion. The second word is where we get the English word "eulogy". A eulogy is a blessing from one human to another. It's why we deliver eulogies at funerals – we are blessing the deceased with our memories. The "poor in spirit" are not blessed by other humans; they are Makarios – blessed by God. It's a direct from heaven blessing to you. The "poor in spirit" are not blessed by humans and they are certainly not blessed by the kingdom of Ceasar. But, here's the good news, the poor in spirit are blessed, directly, by God.

A friend of mine had a letter from President Ronald Regan. It was handwritten, on White House letterhead, and signed. That letter did not get transcribed, handed to a White House aide, stamped and sent with the president's signature. Nope, it was direct from the president's hand to him. That

is how the Makarios works – it is directly from God to the recipient; in this case, the one who is poor in spirit. The blessing doesn't go through the Church, or a denomination or an individual house of prayer or a pastor, or a church committee; nope it is straight from God to you.

So, here it is: *Makarios* are the poor in spirit… What in the world does *poor in spirit* mean. For starters, it's a direct word for world translation. But, what "poor" meant in the 1st century is a little different than what it means for us. Poor in spirit would mean to us someone who doesn't have much spirit. But, that's not the case in 1st century Greek and the Early Church theology.

Think of it this way: someone who is economically poor is well aware of their circumstances and is quite conscious of how much money they have coming in and how much needs to go out. For some economically poor people, each dollar is important and none is wasted. Someone who is "poor in spirit" is therefore someone who counts their blessings the way someone who is economically poor would keep track of their money. The poor depend on everything that they earn. Likewise, the poor in spirit are completely dependent upon God, upon their faith, and are quite conscious of their trust and dependency of God. Therefore, *makarios are the poor in spirit* (those who are dependent upon their faith) *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

Now this phrase makes more sense. The Kingdom of Heaven belongs to those who are conscious of their faith and practice of their trust in God. Blessed are the poor in spirit. God's fingerprints are seen in how some value their faith and live it out in the world. Blessed are they who do.

The next phrase is this: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Widows were some of the most vulnerable people in the 1st century. Some would hide their grief because they didn't want others to know that they were vulnerable. It's similar to what my dad taught me growing up. If someone knocked on the door, and no one else was home, I'd say out loud to an empty house: "Dad, get the gun, I don't know who this is." Now, I never had to use that phrase, but you get the idea, don't let the possible intruder know you were home alone (and without a weapon). That's how it is in the Kingdom of Ceasar – hide the fact that you are mourning and try to go with your life as normal. But, in the Kingdom of Heaven, blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

I'd like to focus on the word "comforted". It's the root of where we get the word for a blanket that you place on a bed – a comforter. And no, it's not that God sends blankets to those who mourn; it is that direct blessing – Makarios – of God is felt directly by those who grieve. Many folks have told me over the years that as they were in terrible grief over losing their spouse, they felt a present around them. It's like God had wrapped them up in love and told them everything will be okay. That's the Makarios – it's something one feels. It's invisible and people of the Kingdom of Ceasar can't see it or understand it but for those who mourn, those who turn their grief over to God, they receive comfort from God. In some ways, it's God's fingerprints.

Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth. The meek are not to be confused with someone who is shy, submissive, and do not speak up for themselves. In the 1st century, "the meek" were people who would not use their position or rank in life to lord it over others. For instance, when we were doing an international adoption, there was a clerk who had the passport stamp we needed for our daughters to travel outside their country of origin. The paperwork was

approved by a judge, and everyone had signed off on it… yet the clerk wanted money to place the inked stamp on the passport. That was not "meek" behavior. That was holding their position or power over someone. In the 1st century, the meek were humble, modest, unpretentious. In God's Kingdom, it is the "meek" who will inherit the earth – the crown jewel of all of God's creation. And, most importantly, Jesus calls the meek "blessed".

And so we read this today in all of our various circumstances and our different context and all of the things that are going on in our lives. And if none of this makes sense to you, let me just summarize it with this:

Those who are poor in spirit, God is right there with you.
Those who are mourning, God is right there with you.
Those who are meek, those who are near the end of their lives,
those that are seeing less days in front of them
and many more days behind them.
God is right there with you.

And it's not that just God is with you. That God is blessing you. God is breathing life into you. God is restoring you. God is even identifying with the place that you are. God understands what it's like to mourn. God understands what it's like to be meek. And Jesus understands what it is to be poor in spirit, to be seeking out nothing other than God, to place all that we have on our trust and our faith of God.

So, no, I can't prove to you that God exists. But I am telling you that God leaves God's fingerprints all over the place. And God's fingerprints are most well known in my life in times when I'm mourning – that's when I can really feel the presence of God.

I can see God's fingerprints in my life when I am sad and worn out, I can see that God is running through my life and has fingerprints around me. When I let go of other things of the world and I seek with a pure spirit, with poor spirit and depend solely on God, I then see God's fingerprints all over in my life. And at times when the world humbles me, when I find myself in the company of the meek, I can feel God's fingerprints all around me.

Blessed are those who are poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are those who seek and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are those who come into church and are seeking something other than the world and what it offers. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who are merciful. *Blessed are those* because we find our place in God's kingdom. Blessed are those because God is right there, with you, and sometimes leaves fingerprints.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.