The Rev. Emily Dunevant

Matthew 5:1-12
Revelation 7:9-17
November 1, 2026 Psalm 34:1-10,22
All Saints' Sunday 1 John 3:1-3

Do you remember when your grandparents told you that they walked 2 miles up hill both ways in the pouring rain just to get to school? Yeah. That story. The one you rolled your eyes at as a kid. And I've often wondered if there was any truth to their tall tale…sure maybe it didn't happen quite like they said…. at least not in the physical sense…I've never seen a journey that was actually uphill both ways. Yet, at the same time, as I have gotten older those double uphill journeys feel a little too real. In fact, I can already hear myself telling my future grandkids about my long and arduous double uphill journey to school (when in fact it was actually just across the street).

We tell those stories because in doing so we are passing down wisdom…one generation to another and at the heart of that wisdom are all the saints who have gone before us. The lessons they have carried. The adversity they have overcome. The joy they have experienced. All the while walking uphill both ways even when they may have wanted to stop.

This morning, on All Saints' Sunday, I want us to remember those individuals in our lives who persevered when things got tough. Whose resilience spoke of courage and strength. Who never gave up just because life got hard. These are the people who always had enough grit and grace to go around.

Have you ever wondered where those qualities came from? What inspired them to keep going? And not only to keep going but to help other people out as well.

I want to suggest that these qualities start with a deep understanding of one simple word from our Gospel reading, a word that conveys selfless action, a desire to contribute, an understanding of God's blessing that lingers at the heart of who we are called to be. The word I want us to look at is found in verse 4 of our Gospel reading. It's the word *comfort*. I've chosen this word because our English translation doesn't do it justice. We need more context to grasp what Jesus is teaching.

Jesus says…

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be *comforted."* In our current day context, we often understand the verb "to comfort" in a specific way…usually it's the way we help someone feel better…we do something for them. We bake a casserole. We call them on the phone. We send an email.

However, the Greek verb conveys something much deeper than simply offering to help someone feel better. The full meaning of *comfort* in the Greek calls for our advocacy, an active

commitment to help someone overcome a given situation. In other words, Jesus is talking about working to change the *cause* of someone's pain, to get at the *root* of the problem, not just to put a band-aid on the injury but to create a solution.

Remember, when Jesus is talking to the disciples in these verses, he is preparing them to go out and do something…to bring God's kingdom to fruition on earth, to heal the sick, to help the suffering, to create change. And…He sends them out into hostile territory, uphill both ways. But even faced with a difficult journey, the disciples knew that the outcome of their work was one of blessing. It was one of holiness. They were working to be God's hands and heart into the world. They were working to be holy saints among us.

The Rev. Edmund Harris stated in his Gospel commentary this week that…

"For Jesus, holiness is not about being separate from the world. Instead, it is about entering more deeply into *it. Jesus does not spend his life keeping his distance from human suffering, human failure, or the people others consider unclean or unworthy. Instead, he moves toward them.*

This is what it means to be a saint. Being holy is not about being perfect or pure. It is not about becoming "otherworldly." It is not about keeping our hands clean or staying safely removed from the complicated realities of human life. The call to be a saint is very much a call to be present in this world—to be absolutely involved in it.[1]

So, when those saints who have gone before us heard Jesus' words of blessing, I believe they got ready to move toward discomfort, to seek out places of human need, to find where they had gifts to offer. They had a faith-filled work ethic that kept them looking toward the future with hope. To make a difference for the suffering and the mourning, the meek and the persecuted. To be the blessing God needed them to be.

And, when we call their names on All Saints' Sunday, my guess is that each and every one of the people we remember were the kind of people willing to go the extra mile or two or three to do what was needed to help someone else out…even if it was up hill both ways. The work wasn't an obligation but a deep sense of community…walking life together. That's how we are called to understand blessing. That is how we are called to be saints.

Today, when we hear these words of scripture…Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek, the hungry, the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart and the peacemakers. Blessed are the persecuted…what we should hear are words of comfort…to be absolutely involved in the world. It is our responsibility, our duty, our commitment to the

---

[1] https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons/called-to-be-holy-all-saints-day-a-nov-1-2026/

kingdom of God to not just walk one way when it is most convenient but to walk both ways up hill, in the rain for however long it takes.

Because holiness gets involved. And blessedness moves right toward what hurts.

I want to leave you with a beautiful variation of the Beatitudes written by Nadia Bolz-Weber. And I love her words because they help us see holiness, to see blessing in new ways, ways that call each of us to be to absolutely involved in the world we live in. As I read these words, maybe you will recall a saint in your life who has comforted you in your time of need. Or maybe you will be reminded of someone who needs you to be a saint for them right now. To carry on those lessons of the double uphill journey for one another.

Blessed are they who doubt….Blessed are those who have nothing to offer. Blessed are they for whom nothing seems to be working….

Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears are as real as an ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like….

Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else….

Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone at middle-school lunch tables. The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex-workers and the night shift street sweepers….Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented….You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard – for they are those with whom Jesus chose to surround himself….Blessed are foster kids and trophy kids and special ed kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved and never does.

Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it. Blessed are the merciful for they totally get it….[2]

Maybe today you can go home and write your own prayers of blessings. Expressing your needs and the needs of others. And knowing that whoever you are, wherever you are from, whatever you have done, you are indeed of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

This is the lesson of the saints. The comfort that comes from God. The holiness we are given. The blessings we give in return.

---

[2] https://www.patheos.com/blogs/nadiabolzweber/2014/11/some-modern-beatitudes-a-sermon-for-all-saints-sunday/