

“The Telltale Signs of a Saint”

(Text: Matthew 5:1-12)

St. John Lutheran Church, Massillon, Ohio, November, 2023 – All Saints Sunday

Let’s face it. Some were born into families that have more than others. I’ve lived in the Massillon and the surrounding area for 3 years now. I’ve noticed the places that are considered “better off.” And I’ve noticed the places that are considered “poor.” A lot of times, we think our identity profiling is confirmed when certain people look, say, and act according to what fits. We see in person and online who people think they are by what they say, and by what they possess. But the interesting part of it all is that a lot of times we believe them. We watch and listen to people and are convinced they’re *indeed* better off. And on the flip side, we watch and listen to others and are convinced that they’re *indeed* worse off than others.

Let’s bring this conversation into the kingdom of God, shall we? We look at others and ourselves and make certain assumptions. Some are better off than others. And we at times, without thinking, believe that some are better off, more blessed than others.

Isn’t this way of thinking confirmed in Deuteronomy? **“If you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do *all* his commandments that I command you today...And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.”** There you have it. A Christian is blessed because of what they do! Next point in the sermon... *“Not so fast,”* as they say...

The telltale signs of a saint are not founded upon our dos and don'ts. For if that were the case, what would be so different between the kingdom of this world where you do this and you get that, and the kingdom of God? Notice the LORD says to do *all* his commandments. The LORD also uses the conditional word if. If you do this you will be blessed. But do we do *all* that we're to be doing? No. I'm not talking about paying tithes or coming to the Divine Service week in and week out, and other spiritual disciplines that are good and right. I'm talking about fearing and loving God above ALL things. The answer is no. No, we don't – I don't – do all that is required from God. And with that reality sinking in our minds, what does James say in his letter? **“For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.”**

My prayer this morning is for each one of us, me included, to know that we're poor people. We're spiritually poor and have nothing. By what we do, think, and say, we show everyone, and hopefully ourselves, that we're poor in spirit. We can't do what we're supposed to do in the kingdom of God, even if we desire it with everything that's within us. We're incapable of pleasing God which leads to blessedness because we're not only spiritually poor but we're dead. We're dead in our trespasses and sins. We're poor, dead, people who think that we're blessed by what we do. This is our condition by nature.

So, what is the first telltale sign of a saint? What does blessedness look like? What does a saint look like? Well, it's one who knows that by nature they are poor. Poor and dead I might add myself. This is the telltale sign of a saint. One who understands, knows, and admits, that they are poor and dead. And dear friends, this is good news! It's good news because Jesus says that we are blessed. We are blessed because he says that if you find yourself poor in spirit, then the kingdom of heaven is yours. We don't become poor because we give to God and others everything we have. No. By nature, we are poor and have nothing to give spiritually to God, let

alone others. When we confess that we are poor miserable sinners by what we've done and by what we have left undone, we admit that we come to God and others with nothing.

But the good news is that Jesus gives us access to the kingdom of heaven when we admit we're poor in spirit. In the kingdom of heaven, we're given forgiveness and life from the one who carried my sin, your sin, to the cross and in exchange for the kingdom. All that the kingdom has to offer, he gives it to those who are poor in spirit – those who admit who they are and who can only come as beggars.

If you and I don't accept and understand that we're poor in spirit, the rest of Jesus' words that follow will not make a lick of sense. But because we're poor in spirit, we who admit that we are sinful and unclean, mourn over our sin. Mourning is the second telltale sign of a saint. But understand that our mourning is not manufactured. But rather it comes from a poor spirit that knows the terribleness of sin. Sin separates us from our heavenly Father and his kingdom. Separation from the Father should cause us to mourn. Not only do we mourn over sin, but we also mourn over loss. For it was never God's plan that any should die. But Jesus says that we will be comforted. We are comforted because though we sin, we are forgiven in Christ. What comfort forgiveness of our sins brings. And though we mourn the loss of loved ones, those saints who've gone before us, we're comforted because Christ not only died for our sins but after three days has risen. And all those who're in him, they are not lost in the least. For they are with the risen Christ and his kingdom that rules now and forever. And one day with will be with them also.

When we understand that we're poor in spirit, we become meek, lowly, and humble in spirit. These are the third, fourth, and fifth telltale signs of a saint. In this life, we lose all things in this world. This world tramples over the meek, the lowly, those who are humble. But one day,

the kingdom of heaven will be established fully on earth. And its citizens will be those of meek and humble spirits. For so was Jesus, the King of kings, when he was on the earth. Jesus came to earth in meekness and humility. And what happened to him? He was trampled on, beaten, mocked, and killed. But through meekness, he gained all authority in heaven and earth. For how more meek and humble can one be by going to a cross to die for all people? Through the humility of the cross, he trampled on the serpent of this world and all the evil kingdoms. He has stripped everyone of all authority and power. And all that will be left on the last day is the new earth full of those of a meek spirit.

And when we understand that we're poor in spirit and have nothing to offer, we can't help to cry out to Jesus for food and drink. This is the third telltale sign of a saint. A saint hungers and thirsts out of poverty. Not earthly food that rots. Not an earthly drink that's contaminated. But spiritual food, spiritual drink. And when you call out to him in hunger and thirst, your good and gracious King gives you what you need. He gives you the spiritual food – the very Word of God. He gives it to you. You who are dying from spiritual hunger. It's the bread of the Word that satisfies you. And not only the bread of his Word but the bread of his body and the drink of his blood. In his Supper, you eat and drink his body and blood under the bread and wine. The body and blood of Christ is the only thing that will satisfy.

The telltale signs of a saint so far are those who understand that they are poor, those who mourn, who are meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. But there are more. There's the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those who are persecuted and reviled. These telltale signs are also not manufactured. They come from being in union with Christ – the one who was poor in spirit, who mourned and was meek, hungered, and thirsted in this life. As we continue to join ourselves to Christ, we become like him. In union with him, we receive a pure

heart. With the pure heart of him, we see the Father as Christ did. Only with a pure heart given to us will we see the one true Father. Only with the pure heart that is given to us in Christ, can we see the one true God who is to be worshiped in this place. For how do we know where he is without a pure heart to see clearly? The telltale sign of a saint is one who sees God with the heart of flesh that was promised by the Father through the prophet Jerimiah.

Not only do we receive a pure heart in Christ, but he also shapes us into peacemakers. In the midst of this war-infested world, peacemakers are desperately needed. Blessed are those who bring the peace of Christ that surpasses all understanding. It's the kind of peace that brings reconciliation to the world. It's the kind of peace that reconciles all people who are poor by nature back to their heavenly Father. The telltale sign of a saint, a blessed saint, is one who brings reconciliation. And the only way we bring that peace of reconciliation to others is by being reconciled to God first. We give peace because it's been given to us first in Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

The telltale signs of a blessed saint are all those mentioned and, in closing, the marks of persecution and revilement. On account of our union with Christ, we bear the marks, the signs of persecution and revilement. Have you been given these marks by the world dear saints? I don't need to explain what's going on in the world around us. Fear not, you are blessed. Rejoice and be glad. Your reward will come.

May all the signs of a blessed saint remind you of Christ, the one who went before you. Rejoice and be glad. May the signs point you to the last day when he will come and bring you to himself and his kingdom. May the signs of a blessed saint point you to that last day, when we will be joined by all the blessed saints of heaven who have gone before us.

Pastor Jon Carpenter