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“When is it enough?” Sermon on Matthew 5:1-12

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Today is All Saints' Sunday. I put bells on the banner for my parents and one for my mother-in-law. It's a reminder of the Saints in heaven who are cheering us on. It's a reminder to our hearts to be on the right track of love and caring for one another and sharing the light of the Good News.

If you read your Friday email blast that the church sends out, you might have caught an error. Front and center and in large blue letters, it showed that today was “All Saints' SINDay!”

Some of you Saints have waited a lifetime for the liturgical calendar to come to this day. Finally, an opportunity for those pious pilgrims among us to let your hair down and take a walk on the wild side.

If that is you, I'm sorry to tell you that “All Saints' SINDay” was either a typo or a Freudian slip. And when our administrative assistant responsible for the error returns from Las Vegas, we will have her in therapy, guaranteed.

I couldn't believe my eyes on Friday. “SINDay. Of all the possible typos, “SINDay”? I suspect Westminster will now hold a place in those viral emails of church bloopers, you know the ones that say:

“Remember in prayer the many who are sick **of** our church and the community.”

“After the sermon there where be a moment of silence for prayer and **medication.**”

“Choir tryouts were **hell** last Wednesday evening.”

“Join us for All Saints' **SINDay.**”

But oddly enough, All Saints' SINDAY is appropriate for this Sunday that follows Reformation Sunday. I think the Apostle Paul, Martin Luther and John Calvin, and other Reformers would have gotten a chuckle out of the typo, for they were all strong believers that "...all have fallen short of the glory of God..." Our bad days are SINdays; our best days are SINdays. Presbyterians have total depravity down. This white robe makes me itch. There's no hierarchy here. Priesthood of all believers.

No one here asks, "How's your campaign for sainthood going?" Not here.

Because we know that being human is hard; it just hard. We know that a bad night's sleep can knock off course any hopes for a "they will know we are Christian by our love" day.

There's part of us that gets so bent out of shape when we don't get our way. "I want to do what I want to do!" Jesus was just not that way. "Take this cup from me... but know my will but thy will.

I have met good people who say, "I know I need to forgive..." Just like Jesus forgave people. And I said, "I don't think you need to forgive – you're being abused – you need to get away." Sure, Jesus forgives, but Jesus also tells the possessed, "Demons be gone!"

I have met people who will beat themselves up for some mistake, some typo in the text of life. Perfectionists with an imperfection – they can't get over it. They carry the wound and the scar. Then there are those people who think that the words they use that cut like a knife are "no big deal." They can't see the wounds or the scars they're creating.

Being human is hard.

I think recent years have left our brains and bodies fragile. Nerves frayed. Many have found it easier to remove themselves from the fray. As a result, the polls say we suffer from loneliness. We are lonelier than we've ever been.

It's not easy being human. The Lord knows this. That's why God speaks to us in this way.

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'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.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

To follow Jesus up that mountain had to be a decision of the soul. This text is at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel. What we know about Jesus is because of his ability to heal, he has become very popular. He draws the crowds, they surrounded him. Sounds like a success! But Matthew says that when Jesus saw the crowds, he headed up the mountain as if he was trying to get away.

Why would the Word of God be so elusive?

It feels like it's been my job, and the church's job, to get the word out. We've tried other tactics - billboards, radio, television, even confirmation! We have to get the word out! I did confirmation for maybe ten years. It is the hardest job ever!

TJ invited me to the Confirmation Retreat on Friday Night to get the youth to understand the topic of death and resurrection. I felt like I was a failure. Beautiful kids, but I was trying to get across a message, and it was so hard.

I remember the mother who came to me distraught that her child didn't want to be in confirmation. I said, "Don't worry about this. Maybe it's just not his time." God works in mysterious ways. Confirmation comes, really, when we've had enough. When you look at life and the slop you're feeding the pigs... and that's it. There's nothing left. I've tried everything. I need to set the compass on home. A decision of the soul. I need a word with God! I need a word from God!"

A word from God? What is that? A word from God can be some hard truth. I received an email a couple of weeks ago from someone I had not heard from in ten years. The note was an apology for some behavior. "I was drinking a lot during those days," he wrote. He wanted to let me know that he was sorry. I wrote him back. But a few days later, it occurred to me.

Step 8: Make a list of wrongs done to others and be willing to make amends for those wrongs. Step 9: Contact those who have been hurt, unless doing so would harm the person.

A decision of the soul to climb that 12-step mountain to arrive at some hard truth. "I'm an alcoholic seeking salvation. I need a word with God. I need a word from God."

"It's not his time!" I said to the mother. I remember when I climbed that mountain. I'd gone through confirmation, I'd received my diploma, and my Bible. But there on my paper route was my bully, David Lane. He was years older and bigger than me. He'd take my fist and run into a brick wall. /he did that day after day after day. And I said to myself, "I need direction. From where does my help come?"

And I remember a Sunday School teacher pointing the way home. "Pray for your enemies."

And that's what I did. I prayed that David would be hit by a truck. You don't know why people do what they do. I don't know if David was abused by his father; I don't know why he was the way he was. I'd like to know. "Just pray for your enemy."

One day, it just stopped. He may have gotten tired. But you know what it was for me? It was the answer to prayer. It was confirmation to me that God heard my prayers. And I needed that – confirmation.

When was it for you, that time, when you had enough, and you decide to leave it all behind and climb that mountain?

I think for me it's time to climb the mountain again. I get so anxious about the world and where the world is headed. The wars and rumors of wars. And now we're living in the world of "AI" - Artificial intelligence. When has anything with the word "artificial" been good for you? Artificial sweeteners will kill you. Artificial turf will tear your ACL. Artificial people will leave you empty. Artificial intelligence will make you believe that lies are truths and truths are lies.

I'm getting ready to climb the mountain, to leave the crowds behind. But I don't want to go because I know it's going to be hard. I find myself looking at my watch and asking myself how many years do I have left in ministry? How many years to retirement? I can do this thing for a few more years. This thing. This thing! This thing!

This thing is my life and your life. This thing is what will heal this world. This thing you don't retire from - you die to it - so you can really live. It is a higher vision. We are people who climb the mountain because there's a good word that welcomes all of us with a blessing on a SIN day morning.

You made it! You who are worn out... blessed are you for yours is the kingdom of God.

You made it! You who have been bullied and run over. Blessed are you – you will inherit the earth.

You made it! You who try to do the right thing and want to do the right thing, trying to be saintly, but failing... you hunger and thirst for righteousness.

You made it! My disciples, arise and shine for your time has come. There's never enough light. You are a city shining on a mountain, let your light shine for all the world to see. It's Sunday! And on Monday, we'll get to the hard stuff. Forgive your enemy. Love those who persecute you. Reconcile and turn the other cheek. Walk the second mile. We'll get there. With all the Saints cheering us on, we'll get there.

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