New Life Episcopal Church

Uniontown, Ohio



A Sermon for the 23rd Sunday after Pentecost
November 1, 2026
All Saints Sunday

Rev Barbara Bond

All Saints', Year A

Revelation 7:9-17, 1 John 3:1-3, Matthew 5:1-12

A Great Cloud of Witnesses

In our reading from Revelation, the writer describes a great multitude of witnesses gathered around the throne of the Lamb. On this All Saints Sunday, we can imagine ALL the saints, from every generation, many of whom have struggled and died for the faith. If you glance at my montage of saints on the bulletin cover and also on the back of our Beloved Departed list, perhaps you can imagine these as representatives of all those who have gone before, standing around the throne with palm branches in their hands, the palms being symbols of victory over adversity and death. Your loved ones are in that crowd too, which will ultimately include all of us.

Every era, every generation, has great challenges to uphold what is right and good. Brave souls stand up against the hypocrisy of their own circumstances, as they take a stand for God's kingdom.

Jesus is doing that as he speaks to the crowd. He stands on a mountaintop, much as Moses stood on a mountaintop to deliver the Ten Commandments to the Israelites. Jesus has a gentle message that is in direct contradiction to the society in which he lives. Jesus lives under the oppressive politics of the Roman Empire, who militarily occupy the holy land, and he is also under the thumb of the oppressive Temple system that controls religious life. His message is gentle but firm. It reminds me of Bishop Marianne Budde's sermon at the National Cathedral in January 2025 as she spoke to the new political leadership, virtually begging them to have mercy for those who suffer. She said, Have mercy. Jesus said, Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

These 12 verses from Matthew are the familiar beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, and since all of them begin with the word "Blessed," they are called the Beatitudes. Let us listen to them again, in the gentle spirit in which they were uttered two thousand years ago: Think what your response could be. I like to think we could respond quietly yet affirmatively, "Blessed."" We are in the crowd at that mountain:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Blessed…)

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (Blessed…)

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (Blessed…)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (Blessed…)

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (Blessed…)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (Blessed…)

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God. (Blessed…)

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

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (Blessed…)

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Blessed…)

‘

(Silence)

In John's first letter, the writer says, "See what the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God." The writer considers how different the words of Jesus are from the societal surround, saying, "The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him…When he is revealed, we will be like him." The writer longs for the purity of Christ and the ability to stand against the unrighteousness of the times.

There is nothing new in the ugliness swirling around us. We too long for gentleness and purity in the faith of God. We who whisper these gentle words of blessedness are counter-cultural; yet we can still be brave, and we can still speak truth to power. Let us not be discouraged. Let us be part of that great cloud of witnesses, assured that God's Kingdom is alive and well. We are all blessed.