Blessed Are They

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12
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On All Saint's Day, we have the opportunity to reflect on who we are and who came before us to help shape us and provide what we enjoy today. I wonder how many ways the saints before us were blessed and acted as a blessing to others. Fortunately, I happened to stumble across a treasure this week that contains words of some who came before us. Some of the Following letters directly address someone named Virginia. It is likely all of them are written for this Virginia.

First are some words from Maude Osborne on March 12th, 1879:

To Virginia,
Peace be around thee whenever thou so rest,
May life be for thee one summers day,
And all that thou wishest and all that thou lovest
Come smiling around thy sunny way,
If sorry o'er this calm should break,
May even thy tears pass off so lightly
Like spring showers they'll only make
The smiles that follow shine more brightly.
Your friend,
Maude Osborne

Next are words from April 2nd, 1879, from Louise Drummond:
"It gives to beauty half its power, the nameless charm, worth all the rest
—the light that dances o'er a face and speaks of sunshine in the breast.
If beauty never have set her seal, it will supply her absence too, and many a cheek looks passing fair because a merry heart shines through."
Your Sincere Friend,
Louise Drummond

These words are from Mary Shoomaker from May 2nd, 1879:
"There's no music in a "rest" that I know of, but there's the making of music in it; and people are always missing that part of the life-melody, and scrambling on without counting."
Mary Shoomaker

Words from Luke Moore from May 5th, 1879
To Virginia,
In peace, love tunes the shepherd's reed;
In war, he mounts the warrior's steed;

In halls gay attire is seen,
In hamlets, dances on the village green;
Love rules the court, the camp, the grove;
And men below and saints above,
For love is heaven, and heaven is love.
Your sincere friend,
Luke V. Moore

Finally, I share words from Fannie Morris, from Dec 31, 1880.
"In all the various ways of life
God's ways are always best,
They lead us to the
Golden shore, of everlasting rest.
Your loving friend,
Fannie Morris

Thankfully people have preserved these words from saints before our time. I am sure Virginia and those who wrote these words are saints of some sort. These words remind us how special words from our own minds and pens can be. I think of saints from my own family and life that I would like to write to today. Speaking of all of them collectively, I think, blessed are they.

In some ways like the words we just heard, Jesus' beautiful words from the Beatitudes from our text this week begin the sermon on the mount with a celebration of the character of the Christ community. It is an acknowledgment that God's reign is breaking through the lives of the overlooked.

One might note a difference in Luke who has Jesus delivering the sermon on the plain. In this case, the theology is more important than the geography. Jesus ascending the mountain in Matthew is deeply theological in nature. It echoes Moses receiving and teaching Torah, and presents Jesus as an authoritative teacher of God's will. This further underscores the role of Jesus continuing the Jewish story as the fulfillment of the law and prophets. Furthermore, the sermon on the mount is a deeply Jewish interpretation of covenant faithfulness.

The Beatitudes offer a new perspective on power, success, wealth, security, and honor that do not match the ideas of the political powers of the time. Perhaps they are like the hockey pockey, a song that teaches the culture how to turn itself around. I think they also serve as more than a list of virtues, but also as an actual blessing of the people.

As we near the holiday season, I think of how Dr. Seuss told the redemptive story of the Grinch. I wonder how Dr. Seuss might re-write the Beatitudes to teach them to us. Perhaps it would sound like this: "Blessed are the unusual. Blessed are those who know they don't need to be grand, who know they need God to give them a hand. Blessed are those with tears in their eyes, For God sees their sorrows and hears all their cries. Blessed are the gentle, who don't push or shove, who conquer to world with kindness and love. Blessed are those who hunger for right, to

stand up for justice and shine like a light. Blessed are the merciful, quick to forgive, who show us a kinder and better way to live. Blessed are the people with hearts that are true, who see God's own goodness in all that they do. Blessed are the peacemakers, brave through and through, who build little bridges where walls once grew. Blessed are those who do right when it's tough, who stand for the good when the going gets rough. And blessed are you when the world says you're odd, for choosing the narrow as a beautiful ode to God." After hearing that, it might not be Dr. Seuss as much as something from Longfellow Deeds (if you have seen the Adam Sandler rendition of Mr. Deeds).

Some of us recently took a class on the Nadia Bolz-Weber book, *Accidental Saints*. In it, Nadia shares her own set of Beatitudes imagining what Jesus would say to us today: (examples from pp. 184-188).

> The words of the Beatitudes are not so much commands as they are declarations. Blessed are we who have the opportunity to be among the blessed community. We get to join in on the work of covenant building and strengthening relationships, while we remain humble and know that we are in need. We can be peacemakers who thirst for justice and righteousness as we offer small blessings to one person at a time. Blessed are they who stay for fellowship in our dining room today, to be among the faithful. And blessed are they who must go home, who God has called to a good work outside of our walls. Blessed are they who observe and listen, whose big ideas will benefit many. Blessed are they who are here today, who hear God's Word, and eat at the Lord's table. For they are in the loving presence of God.

The Beatitudes are not a ladder for getting into God's kingdom. They are Jesus' announcement that God's reign is already breaking into the lives of those whom the world often overlooks, and they describe the kind of community that emerges when people trust that reign more than the values of power, success, and control. Blessed are we who get to live in God's kingdom right now.