

Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.

Today we celebrate All Saints' Day and remember the communion of saints who have gone before us. This year this holy day is bounded by both the pandemic we are living in the midst of, and the divisiveness and uncertainty of Tuesday's election.

How do we faithfully walk through these days? It helps to name that we are in a liminal space.

The word liminal comes from the Latin *limen*, meaning threshold – any point or place of entering or beginning. A liminal space is the time between “what was” and whatever is “next.” It is a place of transition, a season of waiting and not knowing.

It is fitting, then, that the Gospel we read today is Matthew's Beatitudes – for this scripture brings us close to the already-and-not-yet character of the Kingdom of God.¹

The Beatitudes is one of the most well-known pieces of scripture. Twenty centuries of Christian repetition will do that, but even biblically illiterate 21st century Westerners recognize them as the kind of words Jesus is *supposed* to say. For many of us they are likely so familiar that they have become a sage chestnut we pick up and remember together with a knowing nod.²

¹ Tim Beach-Verhey, Theological Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4*.

² Allen Hilton, Homiletical Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4*.

This makes it easy to let this passage wash over us, and to enjoy it like scriptural comfort food, instead of paying attention to how it tells us something essential about walking faithfully.

That something is found by digging a bit at the roots of this passage. One of the sources specific to Mathew's version of the Beatitudes (as opposed to the version found in Luke's gospel) is likely Psalm 1. This is important because using Psalm 1 as a lens for Matthew's Beatitudes breaks open our understanding of the word *blessed*.

There are two Hebrew words for blessed – *barak* and *'ashar* – each with a slightly different meaning.

Barak means to “bow or stoop” as in Psalm 103, “Bless the Lord my soul” – “Bow to the Lord.”

Psalm 1 uses the word *'ashar*, which means in its literal sense “to find the right road”³ – as in “You are on the right road when you walk not in the way of unrighteousness but in the way of the Law of God.”

Hear the Beatitudes again, with this intent behind them:

You are on the right road when you are poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.

You are on the right road when you mourn, for you will be comforted.

You are on the right road when you are meek, for you will inherit the earth.

You are on the right road when you hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you will be filled.

³ Earl F. Palmer, Pastoral Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4*.

You are on the right road when you are merciful, for you will receive mercy.

You are on the right road when you are pure in heart, for you will see God.

You are on the right road when you are a peacemaker, for you will be called child of God.

You are on the right road when you are persecuted for righteousness; sake, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.

You are on the right road 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.

It is hard work – staying on this path – however the beatitudes are not a list of instructions for living, but rather a description of the world as it is, and how we are to navigate through it. They show us a glimpse of the reign of God. And they are words of consolation for we who live in this disordered and broken world.

Through them Jesus is calling us to follow him in the way of love by reminding us that it will not be easy, but that it will always begin and end with God's blessing.

In this journey we join the throng of saints who have trod this road before us. This road, which is a liminal space – a threshold between what has been, what is, and what shall be.

And when we faithfully walk this path of consolation and good news, we shine a beacon of God's love that can guide others in the way of love. This is how we hold on to hope – and each other – in troubling times. May we continue to choose this way today and in the days to come. Amen.