

“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN”

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Elkton United Methodist Church
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All Saints’ Sunday

Revelation 21:1-7

Matthew 5:1-12

At first glance, the title of this sermon seems like an oxymoron. “Blessed are those who mourn.” You know what an oxymoron is, right? Two words or a phrase with words in it which seem contradictory – like “alone together,” “clearly confused,” “working holiday,” or “jumbo shrimp.”

“Blessed” and “mourn.” If you’ve ever lost someone you love, I daresay you wouldn’t necessarily put those words together – because when you lose someone you love, in some ways, the last thing you feel is blessed.

You feel sad, alone, distraught, sometimes angry – but blessed, I don’t know. There’s a great big hole in your heart, and you wonder if things will ever be okay again.

Back in January of 1995, when we got the news that my father had been diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease, a dear friend of mine asked me what blessings I thought would come of it. What blessings?! I wanted to scream at him – “Blessings! What do you mean blessings?! Didn’t you hear me just say Lou Gehrig’s disease – there are no blessings!”

But you know what? My friend was right, he knew what he was talking about, he just said it at the wrong time for me. There were blessings on that journey we made with Dad, and they unfolded all along the way.

And so it is with death as well. It is true – blessed are those who mourn – because if your life hadn’t been touched by that person, if you didn’t love that person – you would not mourn. You would just go on as if nothing happened. But no, your life changed dramatically, and it is because one who touched your life so dramatically has gone away. You were blessed, and you are blessed even as you mourn – because God blessed you with this special person.

Today, we as a congregation are blessed mourners – for we have loved and cared for these eight members of our church who passed away this year. We are better for having known them. They touched us in wonderful ways. While we

mourn their passing, we are ever so grateful that we knew them and loved them and had them with us for as long as we did.

We watched them with their families – some of them blessed with children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren. We saw the gifts they possessed – music, fly-fishing, knitting, homemaking, and so many others. We spent time with them – in Bible studies, at circle meetings, on bus trips, in restaurants and around dinner tables for meals together. We worshiped with them – some sitting in the same place year after year after year with that special group of friends, some sitting in the choir making music with friends, some serving meals for years in Weldin Hall. We loved to laugh with them and sometimes we cried with them. We'll remember those special things about them – their great, big laughter, the sweet sound of their singing, the meals they set out at their tables to welcome us, their hugs – so many things.

All of them – all eight of them – touched us in some special way. We were blessed to know them and have them in our lives, and we have been changed by their loss. But oh, how blessed we count ourselves to have had them for as long as we did. And oh how we God thanks and praise for that.

And more than that, today, we give God thanks and praise that He has granted them all new life, eternal life. He has welcomed them all home, where their pain has ended and they are at peace. That's how we get through our grief – we remember and give thanks that because Jesus rose from death, because He lives, we know they live as well, we remember where they are, and with whom they are, and know that, for them now, all is well.

Do you know that one day, someone asked the famous hymnwriter Fanny Crosby, who was blind, if she wished she could see? Do you know what her answer was? She said “No, because I know that the first face I will ever see is the face of Jesus when I die.”

That's why we rejoice this day, my friends, because these eight members of our church, and so many more whom we have loved who have died this year – they, all of them, have seen the face of the Lord, and one day, so will we, and we will see those dear ones as well.

So we are blessed mourners this All Saints' Sunday. While we wouldn't have chosen to lose these whom we love, we count ourselves so blessed for having had them in our lives, and for having a Savior who carries us through it all.

With gratitude then, for these dear people, and gratefulness that God has welcomed them home into His arms once again, let us remember these saints of our church who have died in the past year. And after we watch the video and have a

prayer, during the hymn you're invited to bring your flower in memory of a loved one to the vases in the front of the church.

So let us now remember the saints.