Blessèd (Blessed)

All Saints Sunday, Year C, November 2, 2025

It may say something about me that I read and say that word in two syllables – '**bless**-ed – and not one: 'blest'. I find when I hear it in one syllable, as when someone says, "I am blessed" or "You are so blessed," the word 'blessed' sounds twee to me, little more than a Christian word for "lucky". 'Fortune has smiled upon you', 'You are so lucky', 'You are blessed' – they all got that same swing.

Swing, or maybe drawl. It's not for nothing that most of the most cutting, yet still polite, responses I've heard in this country, particularly in the southern portions of it, begin, "Bless your heart…"

But: 'Blessèd be thy heart, and upon thy inmost core may God's grace come'? That's the cadence we want, the song of our people. Bibles and books of prayer at one time added an accent over the second 'e' in the word to helped reader and hearer alike know when the word was to be said in two syllables: *blessèd*.

It may be that Bibles and prayer books would do well to return to that practice and ease the lector's tongue as it twists around "Jehosaphat" and "Achitophel," not to mention "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego." If it was good enough to do in 1611, it's good enough to do today. If the church wants us to read things out loud, they gotta help us know how. Blessèd in two syllables makes it quite clear that it is the simple past of the verb "to bless." Likewise, its opposite, cursed, is the past tense of the verb "to curse," though we say that more often with one than two syllables. I don't know whether the accent they use for this is *l'accent aigu* or *l'accent grave*, and for this purpose don't much care. Point is, there's a difference to the ear, and through it to the mind.

In two syllables, the word blessèd is set apart – sets itself apart. Said such, it gives itself a happy rhyme with the Hebrew word *hesed,* or *chesed*, two syllables, stress on the first. *Hesed* means tenderness and compassion to others – in a word, loving-kindness, which is really two words. Yet the meaning is clear as though they were one.

A simple summary of the Beatitudes – the blessings which we heard from Jesus this morning – would be simply that the blessèd are *hesed.* Blessèd are you who are loving when you are kind and kind when you show love, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Or, to sharpen the point, blessèd are you for you are the kingdom of heaven. You bring it to life. You make it real. It was knit within you when you were made, inscribed upon your hearts. You have brought it forth in how you live and move and have your being.

As Jesus said, blessèd are you who show mercy, for mercy will be shown to you.

How beautiful that sounds; how glorious.

How beautiful it would be if it were true.

Alas, we see all too often how it is not true, and how those who show mercy are shown anything but. There's always someone who sees tenderness and compassion, kindness and love as a threat. There's always someone, some group who is terrified that peace will break out, and with it what they consider their justification to wreak terror. mayhem, murder, and war. There's always someone dying because someone else refuses to be kind. There's always someone refusing to be kind because they fear that, if they are, someone will use their kindness against them.

Imagine hearing them for the first time, though. I mean the Beatitudes, Jesus's list of blessings. To hear them is to begin to understand how they would change us. Most of those who heard Jesus speak these words up on that mountain were hearing them

for the first time. What was that like? Well, listen to them here in a new way. Each blessing is a reversal of what we expect:

- The kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are poor, whether in spirit or in substance.
- Comfort will come to those who are grieving.
- Mercy will come to those who show mercy.
- The earth will belong to the meek.
- Those who long for righteousness will find their longings fulfilled. We do not know how, and we do not know when, but we know *that* – Jesus, somehow, some way, knows *that*.
- Those who make peace are God's children. They are the brothers and sisters of Jesus himself, in a way, sons and daughters of a loving God who wants war, strife, torment and misery to pass away, along with all tears and sorrow.
- If your heart is pure, you will see God – in the mirror, most of all, as well as in the faces of your sisters and brothers, and in those of the makers of peace. In the image of God were we made, and when we can look in the mirror and see that, look in other people's eyes and see that, we can see what is true.
- Those who hurt you because you are good – those who lie about you or to you because you are good – ah, rejoice in this, Jesus says. So do they do to all who speak the truth and are good. 'They', of course, are those who refuse to be pure in heart and who refuse to show mercy. 'They' crave evil, sow division, despise truth, serve themselves, and would corrupt and divide us in their desire to hold by force what they stole by guile, or vice versa. In short, humanity in the full flower of *la condition humaine*. What did you expect?

Well, Jesus, to be honest, we expected something more than things going on as they always have. If the meek shall inherit, why have we not done so already? When, in

fact, will mercy be shown to the merciful, or the kingdom of heaven come down that Thy will be done on earth as it is in that heaven, wherever it is, and the poor be blessed and set free?

No-one knows the answer to those questions. Many of us would like to know, although if the answer were, "All Saints Day 2425," we might feel it as a bit of a let-down. Humanity has to endure another four hundred years before all will be made right, before those who should get all the good the world can give will get to get it? Well, we can't say that we're surprised. Is there anything we can do to speed things up? Shorten the time of waiting and expectation? Make your blessings, O Lord, come true?

Ephesians, from which we heard this morning, has some ideas about this. God will give to the faithful the spirit of wisdom and revelation, "that with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe."

Hope, riches, power – not as the world gives, but as God gives. The power not to command or control, but to serve and heal – the power, that is, to live with compassion and not contempt, to uphold the dignity of every human being, even those who militate against others' dignity or their own. Riches made not of silver or gold, or worse – riches not of human make or of anything a dragon might hoard in the face of others' pain and need, but the wealth that is being able to live healthy, fulfilled, and flourishing lives as free people safe beneath their own vine and fig tree, and then where sorrow and sighing are no more. Hope centered not around these things, or anything vain, but in what is best of the things that last: light, love, and the memory of successes and joy. Hope in, and for, that peace which passeth all understanding – which, since we can't understand it, we may simply enjoy.

We'll be like God, that is, see God's image truly in the mirror and one another's faces, know fully even as we are fully known. We will, as I said, have hope. Why? Because we will know what it means to love and be loved, be blessings and *hesed* as God is and wants us to be. When will that be that end? Ah, that we do not know. We know *that* we will be as God is, but not *when* we will be as God is. What to do in the meantime? Purify ourselves, even as God is pure. Don't let the ignorance and filth of the world soak you in the mire of its vanity. Don't stop believing. Love like you mean it. Love until it hurts – because it will. Just ask God.

Blessèd are they who do this. Blessèd: set apart, consecrated, made holy, shown God's favor. Not, strictly speaking, lucky, but also not unlucky. They have set themselves apart from what is worst in humanity and purified themselves to be as God made them to be, and not as others stopped themselves from becoming and would stop others, if they could. Pure – that is, free of what would contaminate, adulterate, diminish, or spoil them, or be superfluous in them; without guilt, blame, or guile; innocent; moral; 'perfectly in tune and with a clear tone' (OED).

How beautiful that sounds. How glorious.

How beautiful the fact that it is true. *Amen*.