DATE: November 1st, 2026
TEXT: Matthew 5:1-12
THEME: Saints are blessed by God and lead others to know God's blessings.
SUBJECT: Blessing, Beatitudes
TITLE: Remembering Saints

Main question: Who are the saints in our lives?

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, fill our minds with your Word and help us to be curious. Increase our love for one another, and inspire us with a commitment to create a transformed world, starting with ourselves. Amen.

"Blessed." That's kind of a strange word. Not many say it in normal everyday conversation. Much less like this: bless-ed. That's reserved for religious talk, particularly when people read this section of Matthew from traditional texts. It has been pronounced that over centuries as people have read Matthew 5 and saying "bless-ed" signals to everyone that we're not using everyday speech. We're quoting a sacred text. It also happens that blest (blessed) is a past tense verb, as in "He blessed the bread and broke it …" "Bless-ed" is an adjective meaning *holy, revered or favored by God.* "Bless-ed are the poor …" "Bless-ed are those who mourn …" Bless-ed are the meek…"

So, when I read the First Nations version of this passage, it was jarring. (Much of the way the FNV says things is thought provoking. That's why I like reading it.) Rather than saying "bless-ed", we read, "Creator's blessing rests on …" as in: "Creator's blessing rests on the poor"; "Creator's blessing rests on the ones who walk softly and in a humble manner." And this one which has a particular impact coming from a First Nations perspective: "Creator's blessing rests on the ones who walk a trail of tears." Wow! That gives a whole new meaning to what it means to receive "Creator's blessing."

We're talking about the Beatitudes here, of course. My friend Miriam (Webster) says that "Beatitude" means "a state of utmost bliss." Is Jesus saying that the poor, the

meek, those who are persecuted because of righteousness, and those who walk a trail of tears are filled with utmost bliss? I don't think so. The "utmost bliss" part seems to come after the hardship and difficulty: "Creator's blessing rests on the poor, the ones with broken spirits. The good road from above is theirs to walk." "Creator's blessing rests on the ones who walk the trail of tears, for [Creator] will wipe the tears from their eyes and comfort them." The second part DOES sound like ultimate bliss, although I could do without all the hardship and difficulty that appears to be a necessary precursor to all that bliss.

The Church has taken all of this to a different level, and by "Church" I mean the Church Universal. As you may know, there was no Catholic Church or Protestant Church before about 500 years ago. It was just "Church," and the Church created the word "beatify" out of the word "beatitude." In order to be "beatified," one has to die first. They may then go on to receive the title of *Servant of God*, then *Venerable* and, finally, *Saint*. It took many centuries for this process to evolve, but the first person to be beatified by a pope was Saint Ulrich in the year 993 C.E. The Catholic Church (as we now know it) continues the practice of officially declaring a deceased person to be among the "blessed" saints.

Protestants (Presbyterians and others) don't do this so much. And yet I asked many of you before today to identify "saints" in your life. We just heard about two of them and we'll hear a roll call in a short while of people from this congregation and in the wider world who have died and whose spiritual presence remains with us, who continue to shape us, whose love lives on in us still. They aren't officially saints, and so my apologies to those who come from a Catholic background and have more experience with saints. Whether we're talking about those who have been beatified by the Catholic Church or those whom we have known in our own lives, however, one thing is clear: these people weren't perfect. Who knows if Saint Ulrich or Saint Francis of Assisi or Saint Theresa of

Ávila were worthy of being "beatified?" That's not what I was suggesting when I asked you to name "saints." I was aiming to have folks identify those who have influenced us and who live on in us. Some of them have done great things; some have lived exceptional lives; some have exemplified joy and love and have inspired those around them to do the same. But I hope you didn't think I was asking you to identify perfect people whose way of living none of us could hope to match. Someday, our names may be on a list to be read aloud in worship, and it may be as difficult for you to imagine right now that you may be called a saint, just as it might have been for those whose names we'll soon recognize when they were yet alive. Still, we'll recognize them and, yes, we'll even dare to call them saints even if they weren't perfect people. Paul tells us in Romans that "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). In plainer language, as a friend once put it: Nobody slides. Even people whom we identify as "saints" had their struggles. Mother Theresa was filled with doubt for most of her life. She described her inner state as a blank space, feeling that "there is no God in me," that "within me everything is icy cold." I also understand that she wasn't always a pleasant person to be around. Heck, Mr. Rogers probably even had his struggles, yet if the Presbyterian Church were ever to begin "beatifying" people, he'd be the first. But, at their core, saints were just like us. They had their gifts and strengths and we have ours. They had their vices and we have ours. And in a way, lifting up others as "particularly blessed by God" may not be best because that separates us from them and, more importantly, it separates us from God. If God has blessed them because of what they've done or who they are, then one might think that we're a little less blessed - as if to say that blessing is a limited resource reserved for the most deserving. I just don't believe that.

So, how might we think about saints? Maybe saints are simply those whom we choose to honor. Perhaps they <u>did</u> show us how to love better. Maybe they <u>were</u>

particularly kind and pleasant to be around. It's possible that we learned important things from them that we've found helpful and meaningful in our lives. But saints aren't untouchable. If anything, they are real, they have substance, they are human in all the ways that humans can be. One problem with calling someone a saint is that it tempts us to say, "Well, I could never do that!" Why not? Why can't we all do great things? We may not do the same great things, but, to quote Mother Theresa, "We can [all] do small things with great love." Are we amazed at people who go down to the ICE facility and stand as witnesses against the dehumanization of immigrants? Are we amazed at those who go out of their way in service to the poor, the sick, the lonely, the imprisoned? Actually, that's what all Christians — all people — should do. Are saints so great? Only in our minds. Not in God's mind. In God's mind, all are great. All are blessed. Creator's blessing rests on each of us when we walk softly and in a humble manner, when we walk a trail of tears, when we're merciful, when we're hunted down and mistreated — and even when we aren't. We just recognize God's blessing more when we're vulnerable.

And so, as we hear names of "saints" called out in a short while, let's give thanks for lives lived in all of their humanness and in all of their blessedness. Let's give thanks for God's love for them and for us. Let's give thanks for the ways that God lived through them to inspire others, and let us also recognize the ways that we inspire others. For someday, our names will be called out as theirs will be today. When that day comes, may the calling out of our names remind others to give thanks to God, to remember God's goodness and mercy, to look to God for hope in times of hardship and difficulty, to remember that Creator's blessing rests upon us all. Always.

Blessed be.