

Willow River Parish**Title: You Are Blessed****Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-12 (NRSV)**

¹ When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹ “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Good morning Church! Yesterday was Halloween. In Korea, Halloween is celebrated recently, but only young people wear costumes, dress up, and enjoy the day, not everyone enjoys waiting for this day and decorating their houses like in America. Esther and I experienced Halloween after coming to the states. We like to see various Halloween decorated houses. When we were in California, some of the houses were decorated so scary that we were afraid to pass by them at night. Yesterday, my wife and I bought chocolates and candies at the market and put them on the porch, and some children took what we prepared. We were so glad to see that. Evan will be able to walk next year, and on Halloween next year, I imagine him wearing a cute costume and carrying a candy basket to get candy from door to door.

As you already know, Halloween is October 31st, and All Saints Day is November 1st. I wondered the relationship between Halloween and All Saints Day because the two days looked very different. On Halloween, many people put pumpkins on their porch as a decoration and wear ghost costumes. And, on All Saints Day, people remember the dead who they loved. According to the dictionary, Halloween was started by the Celts. They thought October 31st as the last day of Summer and celebrated November 1st as the first day of the new year.

They believed that from October 31, the power of the sun was weakened, and ghosts and dead people came to the land. Some say that people dressed up as ghosts to drive out ghosts and dead people, and some say that they tried to mingle with their dead ancestors by dressing up like ghosts. It was a little more convincing to me that they remembered their dead friends and family by dressing up as ghosts.

Today's Gospel reading is about beatitude. The Bible says, "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: Blessed are the poor in

spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Matthew 5:1-4, NRSV) The poor in spirit means a mind to rely on God, and to trust Him. However, God loved not only the poor in spirit, but also the poor because their only hope was God. Luke 6:20-21 (NRSV) says that “Jesus said Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.” When we read that, we can see that Jesus comforts His disciples. The disciples who came to Jesus were those who needed comfort and help. Matthew 4:24-25 (NRSV) describes who they were, “Jesus’ fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to Jesus all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him...” Most of the people who followed Jesus were sick. They already spent all their money trying to cure their disease with medicine, but they could not cure it and only became poor. At that time, there was no insurance system and social welfare system unlike today. We know how expensive the hospital fee is.

So, they were socially oppressed, marginalized, poor, ill, and criticized by others. They were already poor, so

They had no hope in their lives, were miserable. They were already too poor, and their lives were gloomy. They needed God’s comfort. Jesus declared them that the Kingdom of God is theirs.

As Christians and Methodists, it is right to be the meek, to be the hungry and thirst for righteousness, to be the merciful, to be the pure in heart, and to be the peacemakers. However, if we pursue beatitude as a means to enter the Kingdom of God, we are misunderstanding His teaching. The rich resist by hiring a lawyer when they suffer injustice, but the poor don’t have any power to resist. In the secular world, the poor cannot do anything, or they do not even know

how to resist. Jesus was the only hope for them who had no hope. So, He became their friend, teacher, and family. And he declared blessings to them because they came to Him. Because they came to Him with hope that they can be saved, He blessed them.

Beloved, we cannot get God's grace and love through our efforts. It is a gift that God gave us without a price. We are familiar with give-and-take. We may think that we have to pay that much to get something we want. So, we may have thought that to enter the Kingdom of God, we must pay the price of being the gentle and the merciful. But, let's think about the parable of the vineyard owner. The owner paid the exact same amount to the worker who worked from 6am and the worker who worked from 5pm. The important thing in the parable was not how hard the workers worked, but how much their owner loved his servants. Before our heavenly Father, we are all equal, and He loves us regardless of our abilities and talents. Blessings from God are gifts, not exchanges.

According to Romans 5:8 (NRSV), "God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us." God loved sinners and Jesus declared blessings to those who are poor, sick, marginalized, and criticized because they firmly believed that only Jesus could save them from despair and frustration and their miserable lives. Beloved, Jesus Christ is the only savior and redeemer of our lives. Do you agree with that?

Today is All Saints Day. May you have time to remember your beloved families, relatives, and friends, and remember the grace and the love of God. Amen.