

All Saints' Sunday 2025 C
November 2, 2025
Luke 6:12-31
(Sermon by the Reverend Michelle Manicke)

I wonder: Have you ever noticed that the Scriptures appointed for a particular Sunday are often right on point with what's going on in the world? [Raise your hand, if you've ever noticed that!...] Yeah, I'm pretty sure it's NOT a coincidence that the All Saints' gospel reading appointed for today, the first Sunday after SNAP funding ends, includes these words from Jesus: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" and "Blessed are you who are hungry, for you will be filled...."¹

A few days ago, I saw a news article where it was reported that because the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is likely to be cut off, Oregon's governor has authorized \$5 million of state money for local food banks. "Whew," I thought. "A bit of good news in the midst of hard times!..." But then the next line in the article took my breath away: 757,000 Oregonians are set to have their SNAP benefits lapse.... WOW. Now, math isn't really my strong suit, but with the help of my trust calculator, I did the math anyway, and I discovered that 757,000 in a state of just under 4.3 million people amounts to about 17% of the total population of Oregon. At the point, I was even more curious, so I looked up the national statistics. Did you know that in the United States, which has a population of 340 million, an eye-popping 42 million individuals – that is, 13% of the total population -- stands to lose access to SNAP? And many of those who'll be losing their food assistance belong to the group that's traditionally been called "the working poor...."

Turning to our Scripture, when you and I meet up with Jesus and his disciples in today's reading, we're only about a quarter of the way through Luke's gospel. So, it's noteworthy that in chapter 6, verse 11 – just before our story picks up -- Luke tells us the religious and political leaders are "filled with fury" and are already hatching plans to get rid of Jesus. Why? Because they don't like what he's doing.... They're upset that Jesus is using his God-given wisdom and compassion to feed, heal, and lift up people they view as "inferior" and "undeserving...." Hmm...does that sound familiar to anyone else? I mean, we don't have to look very far, do we, to find similar attitudes in our own day?!... And I think most of us are aware that blaming and shaming the poor for their own plight isn't a new thing. Far from it! In fact, Jesus and many of the prophets who lived hundreds of years before him bear witness that human beings have been inflicting this kind of pain on each other for thousands of years. And we continue to do so, even though God keeps sending messengers who call us to repent and turn back to God's way of compassion and mercy. In the book of the prophet Ezekiel, for example, God pronounces judgment on the leaders (i.e., the "shepherds") of God's people (i.e., the "sheep"), declaring:

Woe, you shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? You eat the fat; you clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatted calves, but you do not feed the sheep. You have not strengthened the weak; you have not healed the sick; you have not bound up the injured; you have not brought back the strays; you have not sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled them.²

¹ Luke 6:20-21b.

² Ezekiel 34:2b-4.

And in Luke 6, we see that Jesus has similarly harsh words for those who revel in their personal good fortune and material wealth, while failing to care for their neighbors in need. Jesus says this:

“...[W]oe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

“Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

“Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

“Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets....”³

For those who might be wondering what a “false prophet” is, it’s someone who tells you the comfortable lie you want to hear, rather than the uncomfortable truth you need to hear, but don’t really want to hear. In our day, we could probably substitute the word “politician” for “false prophet!...”

Earlier this week, I had a moment where I was blown away by the sheer number of names you submitted for our All Saints’ remembrances. I was looking at the worship bulletin and talking on the phone with JoAnn Rothi about ringing the bell for each name, as we always do, when it suddenly struck me: Even though we haven’t lost many members of Zoar in the past year, our list includes the names of 28 dear ones who’ve died within the past year. “Whoa,” I said to JoAnn. “We have 28 names this year; that’s the most we’ve ever had! That’s a LOT of grief!...” Without missing a beat, JoAnn responded, “Yes, that IS a LOT of grief....”

On the heels of that conversation, I reflected on other conversations I’ve had in recent weeks about how we’re all grieving SO MANY THINGS right now. Many of us are grieving for our Latiné neighbors, who are living in constant fear of being detained by the masked agents of ICE. We’re grieving for vulnerable neighbors who are at risk of losing their jobs, as well as losing access to housing, food, and health insurance. Many of us also grieve the efforts to roll back protections for our climate. We grieve for those in the wake of disaster, and for those living in war zones. We grieve the dismantling of democracy, and yes, even the death of democracy. And we grieve for our precious children and grandchildren, who are growing up in this time of division and destruction.

And yet, even as we grieve, you and I know this truth: Where there’s great grief, there’s also great love.... Under, amidst, and beyond our grief there is love. And the greater the grief, the greater the love that abides. Indeed, the Bible tells us that love is the one thing that endures beyond the grave. As Paul declares, “Love. Never. Ends.”⁴ And so, nothing can ever separate us from “the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord....”⁵

As people who’ve been named and claimed by the God revealed through Jesus, we do not lose heart!... We do not lose heart because we’ve come to see with the eyes of our heart enlightened; therefore, we know that death and grief are NOT the end of the story. We remember and hold fast to the assurance that though weeping may spend the night, joy will come in the morning⁶ We trust in

³ Luke 6:24-26.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:8.

⁵ Romans 8:39-39.

⁶ Psalm 30:5b.

God's resurrection promise that love and light and life will prevail over fear and darkness and death, and that gives us courage to live out the radical love of Jesus here and now. I know this because I see you, and -- more importantly -- God sees you!

My friends, our God sees us when we're hurting, and God says to us, "You are blessed.... NOT because you're poor or hungry or mourning, but because I see you. You are mine, and I won't leave you to languish in your poverty or hunger or grief forever...." Our God also sees us when we find ourselves in a place of relative strength, and I'm certain that God rejoices when you and I share the gifts that have been entrusted to us -- material wealth, food, and love -- to lift up our neighbors who are down and out.

Just before sunset last night, I went for a walk around my neighborhood, and I overheard one neighbor telling another neighbor about a food bank at a church in Beaverton, where they could volunteer to help people in need. And I have to tell you, with all the cruel and terrible things that are going on right now, that little snippet of conversation warmed my heart and brought tears to my eyes.... In fact, I have to say that right now my heart is quite full because over the past couple of weeks, I've heard so many people -- including many of you -- asking, "What can I do to help those who are hungry? How can we help our friends at Bridging Cultures? How can we comfort those who are mourning?" And then I've watched as you and so many others take action, showing up to help in a variety of ways, and it's been amazing!...

Toward the end of my walk yesterday evening, the words of a newish hymn sprang to mind, and I'd like to close with those lyrics because they pretty well sum up how you and I are called to live out the all-embracing love of God revealed through Jesus:

Touch that soothes and heals the hurting,
Hands that break a loaf of bread;
Steps that walk beside the weary,
Bearing burdens in their stead:

*"See my hands and feet," said Jesus,
Love arisen from the grave,
"Be my hands and feet," said Jesus,
"Live as ones I died to save."*

Feed the hungry, clothe the naked,
Visit ones in need of care,
Give the homeless warmth and shelter:
Christ will find a welcome there.

*"See my hands and feet," said Jesus,
Love arisen from the grave,
"Be my hands and feet," said Jesus,
"Live as ones I died to save."*⁷

Blessed All Saints' Sunday, friends! Keep daring to love and keep on sharing your gifts because we are blessed to be a blessing. Thanks be to God! Amen.

⁷ "Touch That Soothes and Heals," words by Mary Louise Bringle; tune: Geneva. Hymn 939 in All Creation Sings (2020).

