

Trinity Church
November 2, 2008

All Saints' Sunday
RCL, Year A, All Saints

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

*O what their joy and their glory must be,
Those endless Sabbaths the blessed ones see;
Crown for the valiant, to weary ones rest:
God shall be all, and in all ever blessed.*

“See, what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and beloved, we are God’s children now.” John is right on target when he makes this claim for himself and for every Christian. We are God’s children now!

When Jesus sat down with his disciples to teach them and the crowd, he does so in this context. You are God’s children — chosen to be his disciples. Let me tell you what it means to be joyous.

The Greek word that we translate as blessed is the word *μακάριος* (*makarios*), which means joyous, as in the hymn “O what their joy and their glory must be, those endless Sabbaths the blessed ones see.” The earthly life of God’s children flows from the joy, the rapture, the *μακάριος* that we know in Christ Jesus.

When we, as children of God, turn the face of this joy to those around us and to the world in which we live, *μακάριος*, takes on a particular character, and that character is what Jesus wants to teach us in the eight so-called beatitudes of Matthew 5. Let me presume to speak for Jesus:

1. You have found joy in your trust in God, in your complete dependence upon God’s grace. This is the joy of the Kingdom of God. Those who foolishly rely on themselves and on self-righteousness will call you poor, but I see your joy and glory.
2. The joy of having God as our Father compels us to have genuine sorrow – mourning – over the wrongs and suffering of this world. This sorrow urges us to comfort the suffering with the joy we have been given.
3. As God’s children, we are dispossessed. We have no true home or people or nation, and so we sympathize with the meek, those who make no claims for themselves. With them, our hope and joy is in God.
4. Just as Jesus associated joyfully with those suffering injustice, disease, and even death, with him we hunger and thirst for injustice to be put right. Our conviction is to do that as we can on earth. Our joy is that it is already accomplished in Christ.
5. *Μακάριος* is just another word for forgiveness. To be welcomed as sinners into Christ compels us to welcome sinners into our own joy — into forgiveness. We have no choice — we must forgive.
6. The pure in heart are those who seek God in all aspects of their lives till God is all-in-all in their lives. As the hymn says, “God shall be all, and in all ever blessed.” There is no “this is for me,” and “that is for God.” Everything is for God and in God. Thus the pure in heart shall see God.
7. Our joy in Christ urges us to be in joyful union with others. To be reconciled and at peace in the world.
8. Jesus makes it plain at the end of the beatitudes that the cost of this discipleship is suffering. There is no joy without it, because our joy pushes us to risk the persecution of others in order to make Christ’s compassion known.

So, disciples of Christ, children of God, this is your job description, your character, your μακάριος! Your joy. The saints are those in whom this joyous glory is so manifest that we can see in them Christ himself.

Let me introduce you to a saint. Elsa Brandström was the daughter of the Swedish ambassador to Russia. She lived with her father in St. Petersburg during the darkest days of the darkest war of the 20th century, World War I. She was 24 when she saw hated German prisoners of war being carted through the streets on their way to camps in Siberia and a nearly certain and cruel death. Her heart went out to them in their helplessness, and she felt compelled by Christ to join them.

She gave up the splendor of the diplomatic life of which she was a beautiful and vivacious center, trained as a nurse, used her Swedish neutrality to advantage, and went to the camps. She saw unspeakable horrors, yet, unafraid, she began the struggle of Christian joy against cruelty, and she prevailed. She went up against the suspicion and resistance of hardened authorities, and she prevailed. She stood up to the lawless brutality of guards, and she prevailed. She contended against the cold, hunger and filthy conditions of the camps, and she prevailed. The joy of Christ in her character stood against overwhelming despair. She was a marvel and became known as the Angel of Siberia. Near the end of that endless war, she became ill and was herself imprisoned. Years after the war, Russians and Germans alike could not forget her joyful energy and confident love. She was the beatitudes come to life. When she was old woman close to death, the King of Sweden sent an envoy to her bedside with a message from those to whom the Angel of Siberia had meant the difference between life and death. She would not be forgotten. Elsa wears the crown of the valiant now; the weary ones of the camps are at rest. But

O what their joy and their glory must be.