

ALL SAINTS (OBSERVED) AD 2024
TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
KURTZVILLE, ONTARIO
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Matthew 5:1-12

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

Grief, it touches all our lives at some point. Nothing lasts forever. All things must and do eventually come to an end. Day by day we leave things behind, seasons of life, people, places and things. Our days are punctuated with goodbyes, as we bid farewell to one another as our paths head off in different directions for a day, for a season or for the rest of our lives. As the sun rises on each new day, so it also must set on that day bringing it to a close. All things in this world must and do eventually come to an end - sometimes to our relief, but more often than not to our sorrow and grief.

Yes, grief touches all our lives at some point, because everything in this world only begins to end, everything is born only to die. Yes, the end comes to all things because death comes to all. It comes to those we know, those we love and yes, one day it will come to us too. *All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower fades. Death comes to all and so grief touches all our lives, until its time for someone to grieve over us.*

Too many times over I have walked those long hard steps to the graveside with those that I have come to know and love as their pastor where I learn to groan with the whole of creation for the revealing of the sons of God. Many of you know this ache deep within your hearts. Contrary to what they say, in my experience time does not heal all wounds, it seems to only bring new ones. We can by God's grace perhaps learn to live with this ache, much as anyone does who deals with other chronic sickness, where pain can be made bearable some of the time anyway, but never goes away. Ask anyone who grieves a husband or wife or a child, they will tell you that passing the year mark doesn't just make it all magically better.

Nothing that the world has to offer can make it better. Help you forget? Yes, it might help you forget, but healing? No forgetting can't, won't heal it. And so forgetting, like any covered up wound, only makes it worse on the inside. Trying to forget, trying to pretend like it's not there, filling that empty hole in your heart will only make a mess of it all. Nothing the world has to offer can fill that emptiness. Anything, anyone will never be enough. They will always fall short. You may be able to forget in sleep, but you wake up remembering.

We grieve because we have a longing in our hearts - a longing that can't be satisfied. Grief is like a thirst, a hunger that cannot be met, cannot be fulfilled. We long to see, to hear, to touch, to hold but we cannot and so we ache, we weep, we grieve. The world would say that it's something that we can get over, that we can go through, that we can come through because the world wants to distract us from the reality of death, because if we really face the truth of death, then we will also come face to face with our sin, and if we see our sin, then we might repent, we might know that we need a Redeemer, a Saviour, a Rescuer.

Some are surprised when I talk about the depths of my own grief as a Pastor, how there are times when I question if I will be able to carry on with it, growing and deepening as it does with every hard journey I make to the graves of God's children. Does my faith not spare me from this? At times I can even question myself. And yet there is Jesus standing at Lazarus' tomb weeping for him. If God's Son weeps, clearly faith does not spare us from the longing, the aching, the grieving. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, it is a believing in what was, is, and is to come, but we as yet see dimly. The dead in Christ will rise and yet they have not risen yet. Sin will be no more and yet for this time sin and so death and grief remain.

Faith does not spare us grief, no it does not, but it does comfort us with hope. Now Christian hope is not the flighty stuff of everyday life. Such hope is a kind of wish, something that might, just by some chance, with a little luck, come to happen. I hope she'll marry me. I hope I get the job. I hope I get better. I hope the pastor isn't leaving. Such hope can only more or less be sure to happen, such a hope has some chance of failing, of letting us down, such hope is based on the possible with the real possibility that it might not come to pass. Christian hope is no such hope. Christian hope is about something that will without question come to be. Christian hope is built on a sure and certain truth.

This sure and certain truth is the One who sits with His disciples, who sits with us, on the mountain side today and opens His mouth to teach saying, "*blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.*" The sure and certain truth that our hope is built on is the only begotten Son of God who came down from heaven, who was made incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man, so that He might be crucified also for us under Pilate, suffer and be buried and the third day rise again and ascend into heaven. Our hope is built on the truth of Jesus, the truth that God's Son has taken on our sin and death to save and rescue us from them. Our hope is built on the truth that Jesus died and rose that though we die yet we might live.

When I came here 25 years ago the baptismal font was over in in the corner, not long afterward I moved it front and centre, where I pray that it will stay after I am no longer your pastor, in 10 or 20 years from now. Yes, the font will be staying where I put it for now, because I'm staying right where God put me 25 years ago. The font is where it is to remind you of your baptism and comfort you with what it means for you. Through Baptism God has joined your lives to the life of Jesus. He has connected your flesh to His flesh and your souls to His soul. He has taken away all your sin by taking it on Himself and He has given you His holiness and righteousness in return. But most importantly, He has taken your death on Himself and He has given you His own eternal life. He has given you His own place as a beloved child of God even as He has taken your place on the cross, that you might not die but live forever with Him in His own Father's house.

Through the font God wants to comfort you with what baptism means for those that you love that you mourn. He wants to remind you that He made them to be His Holy Ones, His Saints, through their Baptism into Christ, the Holy One. He made them His own dear children that they might share in His life, a life that is without limit, a life without end, a life that cannot be taken from them. Baptized into Christ, death no longer has dominion over them. Death has no claim on them. Christ has died their death for them, it cannot claim them again. You can only die once. Death only gets one shot at you. When you are baptized into Christ's death, having been buried

with Him through Baptism into death, death has no more claim on you. It had its shot at you on that day. It will not be able to hold you again. With Christ one day you will simply pass through it as those that we grieve have done on the way to the Father's house.

Blessed are they who mourn for they will be comforted. Yes, beloved, the Lord Jesus opens His mouth today to bless you with His comfort. The comfort that comes from the hope that He brings, the hope of what lies ahead, not as a possibility, not as a maybe, but as a sure and certain truth. A sure and certain truth built on Him and Him alone, that those that you remember with love this day, being baptized into His death and resurrection are not lost to you. Death has not swallowed them up, because they fell asleep in the One who is the resurrection and the life. As Jesus lives, so do they. As He is with you, so are they. As He is one with you, so are they. The life you live now in faith is the life that they live with you in Jesus.

Comfort. Its what the Lord Jesus is here to give you as He comes in His flesh and blood, the flesh and blood that won the victory for you, the flesh and blood that have died once never to die again, the flesh and blood that He gives to you that you might not die but live. In your communion with Him today, beloved, truly you live out the heavenly reality of your life in Him, as with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven you laud and magnify His glorious name. In this hour heaven and earth come together, yes, we still long to see, to hear, to touch, to hold. We grieve, but faith is fed as hope is strengthened in this heavenly communion. We may not see or hear, touch or hold them, but the holy ones are near, beloved, they are here with us, with Jesus. Amen.