

As many of you know, at the beginning of this year Jen and I went to the Holy Land with a bunch of seminary students and bible nerds. It was a wonderful trip, full of visits to archeological dig sites, ancient fortresses, and beautiful churches. I loved getting to visit these churches because they were built in places where, according to tradition, Jesus walked, preached, or performed a miracle.

For me, these places we visited were not significant because they were the exact spot where Jesus walked, healed someone, or was buried. There is no way to say with any sort of certainty that the tradition is accurate or not. Besides, there are no footprints left on the waves of the Sea of Galilee, all those healed by Jesus eventually passed away, and the tomb is empty.

What made these places significant was the knowledge that across the centuries pilgrims from all walks of life, from all around the world, walked the path to these shrines, stood where I stood now, and knelt before the God who called them blessed. What made these places holy was not the miracle which supposedly took place there at one point in time, but the lives of those who walked by faith and who left behind their prayers and their examples.

One such place was the Church of the Beatitudes, the place where, according to tradition, Jesus delivered the message we just read. Along the path to the beautiful church are placards with the different beatitudes listed. Each step we took we could imagine ourselves among the crowd of people listening with hope to Jesus' radical definition of blessing, and coming to the realization that, blessed are we.

At the Church of the Beatitudes we joined our prayers with all the pilgrims who came before us. After reaching the church and spending time praying inside, we found a garden and celebrated communion together. The reason we chose to celebrate communion in this Church was because it offered us the place to acknowledge the Spirit of God present in the lives of all those Jesus calls blessed. At the Church of the Beatitudes, we could see how we are connected to all those who work for justice. In that holy place, we were reminded that God's Spirit connects us to all those saints that came before us to show us that walking the way of Jesus is possible.

The way of Jesus looks like recognizing the human dignity and sacred worth of all people. In this sermon from Luke, Jesus tells us that those who the world considers to be outsiders—the poor, the hungry, the mourning, and the hated—are actually the ones who are blessed. During his life and ministry, Jesus spent time with those that the world ignored and avoided.

Jesus show us that blessing the poor looks like being in relationship with them and working to end the cycle of poverty. Jesus noticed the hungry around him and offered them something to eat. He heard the cries of the mourning and listened to their heartbreak. Jesus showed the unconditional love of God. He lived generously. When he could have chosen vengeance, Jesus chose nonviolence instead. Jesus blessed others by treating them with human dignity and respect.

And he called his disciples to follow his example. Jesus called his disciples to remember him—not only by modeling their lives after his but in the simple act of sharing bread and wine.

When we celebrate communion, we recognize that we are connected to all those who Jesus blessed—we are connected to the poor, to those who are hungry, to those who mourn, and to those who are hated. That is what we recognized that day in Northern Jerusalem at the Church

of the Beatitudes. And, as we recognize on the All Saints Sunday, at the communion table we are connected to all those who came before us—all the saints who inform our life of faith.

Being in communion with the saints who have come before us shows us that we might not be perfect, but we are capable of following the example of Jesus. We are called to be a blessing to the world. The Spirit of God connects us to all the saints who came before us who teach us how. They show us how to respond to the Spirit of God by blessing the poor, the hungry, the grieving, and the hated. The same Spirit of God that called Jesus and who worked in the lives of the saints, moves in our lives today. Even ordinary people like you and me are capable of transforming the world.

And so today, I am reminded that when I take communion, not only am I connected with you all and all of the saints of church history, I am also connected to the ordinary, everyday saints who I might not so easily recognize. The same Spirit of God who helped them become blessings, is empowering us to become blessings today.

And when we are a blessing to others, we too are blessed. We learn that from the saints too. At least, that's what I learned from one of the saints of this church, Cathy Fritz.

Before she passed away last year, I had the opportunity to spend time getting to know her better. For those of you who never met Cathy, she was born with osteogenesis, making her bones very brittle and susceptible to breaking. She had lung problems and relied on oxygen tanks to help her breathing. In the midst of these challenges and obstacles, she was blessed with the gift of unquenchable joy, and she used that gift to bless others.

One day after helping her back into her house—her wheelchair battery died while she was outside with her puppy dogs—she shared with me her mission in life. She said it was her mission to make at least one person smile each day. That was how she wanted to be a blessing to others. She wanted to share the same joy she had, with everyone else. She said that if you can make someone smile, then you have made a difference in their lives—and I know that she made a difference in my life.

She showed me that when we follow the way of Jesus, we are blessed with the ability to see the joy and love of God in all things, even in the midst of hardship and challenges. Most of all, she reminded me that when we recognize that we are blessed, we can make a difference in the world. Because we are blessed.