

Imposter Syndrome

Luke 6:20-31

If you've ever read an author's memoir, you come away knowing that writers are insecure ... especially when they're writing. Oh sure, they seem self-confident, like they have the world by the tail. But when they're alone and they're sure no one's watching, they tell themselves that whatever it is they're working on is garbage ... and how did they ever think they had anything important to say? Who are they kidding, anyway? They've seen Marmaduke cartoons with greater emotional range and intellectual depth.

As a corollary to all the self-loathing, writers are convinced that **other** writers don't suffer from all this doubt. In fact, all the stuff other writers write is probably brilliant, unlike all the stupid drivel you've been dumping on the world day after day. Most writers regularly convince themselves that they ought to quit—that the whole thing is just too difficult, and that they're not any good at it anyway.

It's a crisis of confidence: "What if I'm just a big phony?"

All right, so maybe you're not a writer, but have you ever done that to yourself about something you care about? You want to learn Mandarin Chinese, or how to paint with watercolors, or rebuild a transmission, or go noodling with native Arkansans. When you're in the middle of doing it, there are regular occasions, especially when you're first beginning, where you think to yourself, "I'm the worst. A smart person wouldn't have any trouble with this. I swear, I should just give up."

In academia, we call this "imposter syndrome": The fear that very soon people will find out that you're just faking your way through scholarship—that everyone else is competent ... but you, unfortunately, are not.

Imposter syndrome. You're just one step away from being discovered as a fraud.

Have you ever felt that way? I do. On the regular.

And frankly, all my insecurities come bubbling up on All Saints.

I'm not that great at a lot of things preachers, let alone

Christians, are supposed to be **good** at. All Saints is a parade of

names who made beauty from thin air, who seemed to hear

melodies I can't hear. I look down at my own hands and think, I

don't belong in that company. Not with this life. Not with this

heart that still trembles at the hard parts.

Have you ever felt that way—that everybody else has it figured

out, while you're sitting alone in the dark, just hoping your whole

world doesn't come crashing down because of your

incompetence?

But then Luke hands us Jesus' list of the blessed, and things start

looking different:

"Blessed are you who are poor. Blessed are you who hunger now. Blessed are you who weep. Blessed are you when people hate you."

If blessed means approved, then I'm in trouble. If blessed means already finished, already victorious, I should probably sit this one out. But that's not how Jesus uses the word.

In **our** world, blessed sounds like a trophy. But in Jesus' mouth, blessed sounds like a welcome. **When Jesus says blessed, he's naming who belongs.**

That line has rescued me more times than I can count. Because I was trained to believe blessing is praise after the recital, a ribbon pinned to those who stuck the landing.

Instead, Jesus stands up at the start and names the ones most likely to be hiding in the back row. The impoverished. The hungry.

The grieving. The rejected. When Jesus says blessed, he's naming who belongs.

We should pause there, because some of us have carried our hunger like a private failure. Some of us have carried our grief like a rule we keep breaking. Some of us sit in pews and pretend to play at being faithful, certain that the saints would hear our wrong notes.

But Jesus isn't having it. He doesn't romanticize the ache. He doesn't tell the hungry to be **content** with their empty cupboards. He says God's reign is already moving **toward** you.

The table's being set with your name card on it. The tears that you think disqualify you are the very springs that tell the truth about your capacity to love. The contempt that people use to keep you out is the occasion for the angels to pull you up a chair. When Jesus says blessed, he's being very clear about who belongs.

Interestingly, Luke pairs the blessings with woes ... and that matters:

"Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now. Woe to you who laugh now. Woe when all speak well of you."

But here's the thing, Jesus isn't punishing happiness or condemning laughter. He's warning those of us capable of insulating ourselves from need and sorrow and suffering that we might miss the pulse of God. If blessing is welcome, woe is the warning that we can barricade our lives so well that we can't hear Jesus knocking on the door.

The woes say, don't stick comfortable cotton balls in your ears. Don't sand down the edges of your conscience until you can't feel the rough edges of your neighbor's life. Don't confuse applause with love.

The woes tell people who are already fat and sassy to leave room at the table for everybody else. They tell the secure to use their security to make somebody else safe. They tell the well-respected to turn praise into service.

Jesus is **protecting** us from a life that seems successful and yet slowly forgets how to be human. In this sense, even the woes are mercy. They're a hand on the shoulder that says, "Come back here, where everybody else is."

When Jesus says blessed, he's naming who belongs, and the woes are Jesus' way of naming how we get back when we wander away.

Here's where All Saints speaks to a people scared about the slow unraveling of our politics and our common life. The saints didn't wait for perfect conditions to practice belonging. They told the

truth when lies paid better. They guarded the vulnerable when power got careless.

They stood in lines that were designed to make them go home. They wrote letters from jail cells. They counted ballots like prayer beads. They learned their neighbor's name and refused to surrender that neighbor to cynicism in a mask.

The saints weren't naive about empires. They were hopeful on purpose. Hope, for them, wasn't optimism. Hope was a well-worn set of habits.

When Jesus speaks the word *blessed*, it's an invitation to belonging, a call to join the company of those who refuse to let **anyone** be forgotten. We become a people who, when the ground beneath institutions begins to shake, reach out our hands to hold the table and our neighbor steady.

When the powerful rewrite history to clear-cut the world for violence, we answer with the truth that prompts us to stand between the violent and the violated. We show up and refuse to look the other way while people in masks drag our neighbors to God knows where.

All Saints gathers us to remember the great cloud, but not so we can feel small. We say their names to remember what God can do with ordinary lives that keep showing **up**. Saints aren't just the varsity team. They're people who learned to live as if Jesus were serious about who belongs. Some of their stories are dramatic, but most of them sound like this.

There's a saint who slips in ten minutes early every Sunday to set out the crayons in the children's room. Nobody asked. Nobody applauds. They just know that little hands need color and paper to make sense of a world that sometimes feels too big. Blessed are you who make space for small artists. You belong.

There's a saint who has a whole inventory of Tupperware bowls and casserole dishes on permanent loan, because grief doesn't show up on anyone's schedule, and hunger doesn't wait for payday. The dish goes out full and returns with a thank-you note tucked under the lid. Blessed are you who carry warm food like a sacrament. You belong.

There's a saint who stands with a classmate when the bullies start picking on the queer kid. No dramatic speeches. Just standing between the beaten-down and those doing the beating. Blessed are you who refuse to let contempt have the last word. You belong.

There's a saint who's tired enough to cry but still leans in for the nighttime medicine, the paper cup, the soft words, the patience that feels like prayer. Blessed are you who keep vigil in the long hours. You belong.

For those who crossed bridges with John Lewis and prayed with Fannie Lou Hamer and taught little kids to read the truth about God's love for **all** God's children. We won't give up on each other.

For those who held vigil when the headlines said it was useless, we refuse to fall asleep now that it's **our** turn.

For those who fed neighbors when budgets failed and laws forgot, we take our place in the shadow of their legacy of love.

For those who kept showing up when the powerful hoped they'd quit, we stand in their shoes now, bearing the stubborn courage they passed down to us as an inheritance.

When Jesus says blessed, he's telling the world who belongs. And we answer by belonging out loud.

These aren't optional add-ons. This is what sainthood looks like up close. Not perfection, but belonging turned outward. Not

newsworthy, but love that keeps finding its way into the world through ordinary bodies.

The saints around us aren't models in glass cases. They're a choir that keeps us from pretending we're somebody else. They tune the room to mercy. They remind us that Jesus names the poor and hungry and grieving **first**, not last, because that's where **he** stands.

Sometimes, this passage gets read like blessing the impoverished means leaving them poor, that somehow Jesus is asking us to admire suffering.

Of course not. He's naming where God stands, so **we'll** know where to stand. He's telling us to reorder our affections.

He's telling us that the ones we're tempted to **overlook** are the ones we can't afford to **forget**.

He's telling us to build communities where shame no longer has any work to do.

When Jesus says blessed, he's pointing out who belongs, and then handing us to each other so we can learn how to **live** like it.

That's why the strange commands that follow in Luke's sermon on the plain make a kind of sense.

Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. Turn the other cheek. Give to everyone who begs. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

These aren't impossible riddles for religious overachievers.

They're the habits of a people who know they've been welcomed while they were still a long way off. They're what belonging looks like in work boots.

If I know my life has been called blessed before I could prove anything, then I can stop guarding my worth like a secret.

I can risk forgiveness because I'm not paying for my seat at the table.

I can practice generosity without the cruel math of scarcity telling me I'll disappear, because the bread keeps getting broken and passed until everyone has something to eat.

I can show kindness to those who can't repay me because my future isn't a balance sheet.

I can love enemies because God loved me when I was empty, without anything to offer except my imposter self, without even a word left in my heart to write.

All Saints isn't nostalgia. It's training. The cloud isn't here to make us feel guilty about our inadequacy. It's here to make us brave.

We won't let a temporary cease-fire pass for peace.

We won't let exhaustion masquerade as wisdom.

We refuse to let contempt become our native language.

The saints are leaning over the balcony rail right now and whispering. And the whispers you hear in this church when everything is quiet are the voices of all the saints who've made a home here over the last 180-some odd years. Their stories sustain us.

But we've got saints right here, right now, who not only make the world a better place ... they won't be satisfied until all the poor are made whole, until all the hungry are fed, until all the grieving

are comforted, until all those who are hated know that they're loved.

I know who you are. God knows who you are. And just as importantly, the people you bless know who you are.

With all the violence and fear and hatred around us, the world needs us to take our place in the long line of saints. The world needs the love and the healing we bring; it needs the justice and peace we pursue.

But what if everybody finds out I'm an imposter, that I'm not who they **think** I am?

Don't worry, you're almost certainly **not** who they think you are. But take heart: **God** knows who you are—and all that stuff you're worried your an imposter at ... that may be the stuff God loves most. —Amen.