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Episcopal Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa, CA

November 2, 2025

All Saints' Sunday, Year C, Revised Common Lectionary

Daniel 7:1-3,15-18

Psalms 149

Ephesians 1:11-23

Luke 6:20-31

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There's something compelling about a band of heroes, sworn to do good and fight evil.

Think of the legendary Knights of the Round Table; or the Fellowship of the Ring from J.R.R. Tolkien; or the Order of the Jedi; or your favorite superhero team from the Justice League to the Avengers to the X-Men to the Fantastic Four.

I think we're drawn to these stories because they combine two things. First, a group to belong to. As the book of Genesis says, human beings were not created to be alone. We need each other. Sure, there are superhero stories about individual vigilantes like Superman or Batman, but even their stories are better when they have to use their individual gifts as members of a team. The Round Table was famously round so that no one knight would be at the head of the table. We long to be part of a band of brothers or sisters or siblings, to be accepted for who we are and challenged to be our best. A group to belong to.

And second, intense moral commitment. These are not social clubs for hanging out and having fun. They have a purpose that's nothing less than truth and justice and mercy and the salvation of the world itself. There's an idealism to that purpose.

And maybe we crave these stories even more as we live in a time when that kind of idealistic commitment to a moral purpose can seem far away. Fifty or thirty or even fifteen years ago our public discourse in this nation tended to conform at least outwardly to a sort of respectable, vaguely Judeo-Christian-influenced moral sensibility, one that gave at least lip service to the ideals Jesus says in today's gospel: love your enemies, forgive those who harm you, do to others as you would have them do to you. Today that sensibility seems to be slipping away from civic life. More and more of our public discourse just assumes that people are out for their own self-interest and there's no such thing as altruism or the common good. A little over a month ago at the memorial service after Charlie Kirk's assassination, President Trump noted that Kirk's widow had words of forgiveness for his murderer. "That's where I disagree," he said. "I hate my opponent and I don't want the best for them. I can't stand my opponent." I don't think that fifteen years ago a president would have been able to publicly state such an outright contradiction of Jesus' words from our gospel today. Some of this slide in our public discourse away from at least giving lip service to values and virtues comes from the top, from a president who delights in shock and inflammation; but it's hardly his exclusive property nor that of the political right alone. Whether it's a hatred of those we see as oppressors, or those we see as other, today we are surrounded by messages that it's now OK to hate our opponents and seek our benefit alone.

It's not that we've lost the concept of good and evil. It's that we are bombarded by messages today that we are all good and our enemies are all evil. But how far that is from Jesus who says, "Bless those who curse you; pray for those who persecute you." Or as St. Paul puts it in words I think have never been more relevant to the church's mission: "Our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the cosmic powers of darkness; against the forces of evil in the heavenly places."

I believe our society, this country, our whole world, is in desperate need of a moral awakening. Not a moralistic one grounded in self-righteousness. I'm not nostalgic for the respectable churchgoing days of the twentieth century, which cloaked plenty of injustice and hypocrisy. Rather I'm talking about an awakening grounded in the actual moral vision of Jesus of Nazareth which we heard today in the passage called the Beatitudes, or Blessings. "Blessed are you poor; blessed are you hungry; blessed are you who weep; blessed are you when people hate you; woe to you rich; woe to you who are full now for you will be hungry; woe to you when all speak well of you like their ancestors did to the false prophets." This is an upside-down moral vision about a God whose whole personality is about compassion and mercy. We in the church are a band of siblings who have experienced that mercy and who commit ourselves to it in different words in the covenant of our baptism. We commit to seek and serve Christ in all persons and to respect the dignity of every human being: not those we like, not those who like us, but our neighbors, our enemies, those far away, all, all, all. This is a universalistic vision because there are none who are not invited to it.

Today Nolan and Elias, in their own voices, and Eden and Miles through their sponsors, are committing themselves to this vision. They are committing to turn away from the cosmic powers of darkness, from the forces of evil that seduce us to hate and destroy. They are committing to love their neighbor as themselves. They are joining the ultimate band of heroes, which is the communion of saints, the Body of Christ, the family of God across all times and places. It's a band committed to an intense moral vision and delighting in the bonds of belonging. Although in this band we really are not the heroes at all, because Jesus has already won the victory for us. We who are saints are made holy by nothing else than God's grace. In our baptismal covenant itself we acknowledge that over and over we will screw it up: we will turn away and fall into sin and repent and return. When we answer these vows we don't say "I will," but "I will, with God's help," because there is nothing about this Beatitude life that we can do on our own.

Today we welcome these four new members into the communion of saints and they join with us on the ultimate adventure. Our rations are the bread of heaven and the water of life, our path is the footsteps of Jesus, and our hands are empty because our only weapon is love. The stakes are high, nothing less than the ultimate triumph of good over evil, the salvation of the world. Yet the battle is assured and the victory will be won, because if God is for us, who can be against us?