Matthew, Revelation | #blessed

MUC@10, 1 November 2026 (All Saints)

Alison Sampson ~ Matthew 5:1-12 and Revelation 7:9-17

'So I was at the beach at sunrise this morning. And I was in the middle of, like, downward-facing dog when between my legs I saw dolphins. OMG my life is incredible!!! So I grabbed my iPhone 18 Pro Max and took a selfie. Then I sat on the sand watching the waves roll in, and drank my goji berry protein shake with ashwaganda. I'm posting here so I can treasure this moment for always. #blessed. Don't forget to like, share and comment below on how you, too, are happy, healthy and totally #blessed!'

Just kidding. Truth be told, I wasn't at the beach this morning and every time I do yoga I hurt myself. My phone is rubbish and I don't buy supps and if I take a selfie I look weird and strained. Lately my body has gone wonky in all sorts of ways, and now I have a wart on the sole of my foot. And yes, I know life is a gift but actually people keep dying and I keep grieving. And I've never swum with dolphins and I've never been to France and I'm not all that popular. In fact, some people seem to hate me. So am I #blessed?

In Jesus' time, the word we translate as 'blessed,' makarios, referred to those whom the gods clearly favour. The makarios were rich, healthy, successful and powerful. They were the 1%, the elite, and they trumpeted their blessedness everywhere. They organised big parades through the centre of town to show off their power and wealth. They held fancy banquets and ate off gold platters, serving rare foods imported from all over the empire: flamingos, swans, even spiced and honeyed dormice. As anyone who's watched Horrible Histories knows, they were experts at flaunting wealth, exercising cruelty and creating envy. The ways they grabbed money and power and used them were a little different to ours, but a few minutes on social media suggests that maybe not much has really changed. Dormice, goji berries, the public flaunting of wealth, power and influence: it all looks a bit same-same to me.

Into their world and ours, Jesus offers a different view, in which it's actually the losers who are blessed. Blessed are the empty, the grieving, the humble, the forgiving, he says. Blessed are the just. To the uncomplicated, Jesus promises a glimpse of God. To the peacemakers, Jesus promises they will be called God's own children. And to those who are hated and abused for speaking God's truth and doing God's work, Jesus offers encouragement.

They're blessed, he says, because they already live the culture of heaven; their reward will be great indeed.

It might seem bizarre, sitting in a church, to imagine that these blessings are countercultural and that those who do right by God will be persecuted. But context is everything. Insist on peace in Jerusalem today, or proclaim forgiveness for the violence of ICE today, or stand up for a trans family member today, and someone somewhere will become very angry, indeed. Suggest that locking up teenagers might not be the best way to protect our society, or that the man who ran down Helen Haines is deeply unwell and needs not just consequences but help, and someone will accuse you toot-sweet. If we live our faith with courage and integrity, if we proclaim peace and justice and mercy and gentleness, if we try to build bridges between people, we will very soon experience hostility. Criticism will come from the left and the right and from everyone in between.

This is exactly what happened to Jesus. For his peace-making and bridge-building, for his proclamations of God's infinite love and mercy, and for his teaching and healing, Jesus was judged, persecuted, mocked, and killed, and his robes were washed in his own blood.

It doesn't sound #blessed at all. Who, then, can live this faith? What does it take? Jesus assures us that this way of life is blessed, but is this assurance enough when the going gets tough? I don't think so, no. So let's turn to Revelation.

Here we find some startling imagery: a great multitude from every time and place, speaking every language under the sun. They're wearing white, they're waving palm branches, and they're praising the Lamb who was murdered. The Lamb is, of course, Jesus, and this scene is of life beyond death.

Imagine it now. Imagine yourself part of it. If you're feeling very bold or even a bit silly, wave your hands in the air. Because you and I and all of the baptised are already part of this image. Through baptism, we die to sin and become one with the body of Christ. We emerge from the waters and join the great multitude of saints before us and beside us, God's faithful servants of every time and place, even our loved ones, separate from us now, who yet in this mystery are close to us, to quote our gathering prayers. Indeed, there's no such thing as an individual Christian. To be Christian is to belong to the multitude, and we renew our commitment to this body every communion Sunday. 'We are the body of Christ,' we say, 'his spirit is with us.' And, as we later affirm, it's 'given for the life of the world.'

So be encouraged, because we do not live this faith alone. Instead, as members of the body of Christ, we live and die this faith with a vast multitude, far too many to count.

This is what All Saints is about. It anchors us in a belonging so much bigger than we can imagine, a belonging which transcends even death. It gives us courage to live the life of the beatitudes, even in the face of hostility. And it reminds us of a blessedness which has nothing to do with wealth, power, health or success, but which is found in emptiness, in humility, in peace-making, in truth-telling.

If you listen with your heart, you'll hear the great multitude. You'll hear angel choirs singing, and South Sudanese women ululating, and Vietnamese men setting off firecrackers in celebration. You'll hear Argentinian grandmothers at family reunions weeping for joy, and peacemaking Colombians singing 'Gloria! Gloria! Gloria!' You'll hear a word of encouragement from an old friend or two, or your grandfather, or someone else who has passed through death before you and is cheering you on now. You'll hear a great roar like a finals crowd, but there are no losers here: because this is not the world of the 1%. Here, everyone is welcome; here, everyone will be satisfied.

So this day, and every communion Sunday, let us remember that we are gathered in the company of saints who have faithfully followed Jesus through the ages. With the multitude cheering us on, let us praise and serve God in all that we are and all that we do. And, whatever happens to us in this life now, as the Lamb continues to shepherd us and lead us to springs of living water, may we know in our very bones that we are deeply and truly blessed. Amen. Ω

For further reflection:

After all the wild imagery, the Revelation text continues with: 'All heaven fell silent for about half an hour …' (Rev 8:1). Sit in silence for awhile, soaking in the imagery. Wonder: When have you received pushback for your faith? What encourages you? What else do you notice?