

Sermon – All Saints Day

Sunday, November 2nd, 2025

Church of the Ascension, Ottawa

The Reverend Victoria Scott

Readings: DANIEL 7:1-3, 15-18; PSALM 149; EPHESIANS 1:11-23; LUKE
6:20-31

A level place. What does it mean for us, as followers of Jesus, to strive to stand in a level place? What difference does a level place make in our hearts and minds? In our daily living?

We've just heard statements of blessing – and woe – from Luke's Gospel. You might actually be more familiar with the other version of these statements of blessing – these Beatitudes – which appears in Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew, these Beatitudes are part of the Sermon on the Mount. Luke doesn't have Jesus speaking from a mountaintop. No – these statements of blessing and woe that we've just heard are spoken from a level place. This is the Sermon on the Plain. From the verses just before the ones we hear this morning, we know that Jesus did go up the mountain to pray, and after a night of prayer he appointed his disciples. But then:

“He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were

trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them. Then Jesus looked at his disciples and said, 'Blessed are you who are poor...' (Luke 6:17–20)."

What if Jesus is actually leveling the ground in that time and place with his statements of blessing – and with the statements of woe that follow?

Those who gathered around Jesus were materially poor. They were vulnerable, marginalized in that time and place, in that society. In the hills and valleys of that world, they were deep in the valley. Getting to level ground would have been virtually impossible – they had no means, no vehicle by which to move up to a level place. Jesus is lifting them up with this blessing. Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. With that blessing, they are raised up, to stand on level ground with Jesus. They are raised up to stand with dignity – seen, and heard, perhaps for the first time in their lives.

What about the woes? What if this is the same thing – a leveling? Not a punishment for having wealth, but a recognition that true riches are found in kinship with one another? A recognition that we are all called to stand together on level ground, with God and with one another? What if these woes are a reminder that if we are up on a hilltop, wealthy, full of food and laughter, we are missing an opportunity to truly live into our relationship with God and one another? What if fullest living only happens on level ground – when there is both raising up and bringing down?

Think of Mary's words in the Magnificat: "God has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly." What if we've made this too formulaic, too human, imagining too extreme a lifting up and a bringing down? What if the lifting and the bringing down is to a level place – where the lowly and the mighty can stand face to face, eye to eye, heart to heart?

Our Gospel passage brings us more than blessings and woes today. It brings us a call to love our enemies, to turn the other cheek when someone strikes us in the face. Context is everything around these verses. These verses have been misused – used to encourage people to stay in abusive relationships, used to control people.

Jesus is not telling us to passively accept abuse here. In that time and place, striking someone on the cheek meant a backhanded slap to the right cheek that was intended to establish superiority. A punch in the face with a closed fist would have meant contact with the left cheek – conveying a message of conflict between equals. Turning the other cheek to someone who has assumed superiority over us is an affirmation of our own value, and it's a call to the other to consider us equals. It's a leveling of the ground!

And the last verse in our Gospel passage today, the "Golden Rule": do unto others as you would have them do unto you. This verse too has been misused, misunderstood. This doing unto others has to happen on level ground. Some of you will have heard me talk about the "Platinum Rule," which turns the dial to make this call to do unto

others this instead: do unto others as they would have you do unto them. How can we “do unto others” with love, with generosity, with compassion if one of us is on a hill and the other is in a valley? This “doing” has to happen on level ground – face to face, heart to heart. We have to look into the eyes and heart of the other for this “doing” to have meaning.

Today we're celebrating All Saints Day. I wonder if, as we remember the saints who have gone before us, too often we put saints on pedestals. If we remember saints as superheroes – “super-Christians” who are better than the average Christian. What if saints are those who recognized God's call to level ground in this life? If they are those who see that hills and valleys can oppress and create distance and division in this life? I wonder if saints recognize that fullest living is found in standing on level ground between blessing and woe, recognizing that life is both these things. I wonder if saints are those who recognize that we are all called to lift up and bring down to level ground. If we stand on level ground, we are never alone. We can look into other faces, we can relate eye to eye, equal in our belovedness by God, on common ground as we make our way through this life.

There is a leveling that happens when we worship together. We can come here, into community, feeling as though we have spent the week in the deepest of valleys, and find level ground in Scripture and song and sacrament. We can find level ground looking into the faces of those around us.

Our worship, our Anglican tradition, our faith offers us all the views—Jesus spent time “up high,” on a mountaintop. He didn’t stay up there, though – he came down to a level place. We’re invited to consider the long view from the mountaintop, but that’s not where we’re called to live. There is missed opportunity for connection and meaning if we isolate ourselves on higher ground out in the world. We’re called to live and love on level ground, and we’re called to leveling in our humanity. We’re called to lift up the vulnerable and marginalized to stand on level ground with us, knowing that God is with us. We’re called to bring down those who create isolation and division from a high place of power and control – not to bring them down to the depths, but to bring them to level ground where we can all live in love, with God and with one another.

May there be leveling in our hearts and minds in our worship this morning. May we find level, common, loving ground as we sing and pray and share in the sacrament together. May we all go out into the world with fresh energy to join with God’s leveling mission of love in the world. In Jesus’ name. Amen.