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“Blessed Are”  
Matthew 5 and Psalm 103  
All Saints Sunday  
Todd Smith Lippert

My mind has been focused on a friend of mine this week. I met this friend, Walter, at seminary. He was my Historical Theology TA. With wisdom and skill he helped me wade through the writings of Athanasius, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther. God knows I needed the help, and I am grateful to him. After seminary we reconnected in a two-year continuing education program and then after being in different parts of the country we served an hour and a half away from each other in Wisconsin. We met regularly to talk church and family and our families would get together from time to time.

This summer Walter shared that he was entering the search process and he asked if I would serve as a phone reference. I agreed and not long ago I received a call from a diligent search committee member wanting the scoop on Walter. This search committee member turned out to be from a big time UCC church looking for a Senior Minister. I was so excited for my friend I could barely contain myself. This position is a big deal. This week I got an email from Walter saying that the Search Committee had selected him as their candidate and the congregation will vote on him in Advent.

A few sentences later in the email Walter shared that just after receiving this good news, he received the news that his mother, after a long struggle with her health had just died. My heart dropped. Even when there is great excitement, moving is a time of grief and leaving a congregation and the many relationships that have formed over years of ministry is a time of grief, and all of those feelings will be

piled on top of the world stopping grief of losing a parent. I thought of the two people that Walter would be over the next six months. The visible person will be saying goodbye to a congregation that will truly miss him. He will do his job and will take the time to say the goodbyes that need to be said so the church can be as healthy as possible going forward. The visible person will be starting a new position and receiving the hopes and expectations of a new and excited congregation. Meanwhile the invisible person, the person on the inside, will be aching. Meanwhile the person on the inside will not be himself, not just for a week or two, but for months as the grief ebbs and flows. I thought about how often we are those two people: the visible person showing the world one thing, while invisible person is dealing with great hurt.

Today is All Saints Sunday, a Sunday when we remember the shoulders on which we stand as people of faith. We remember the most famous saints and the great risks they took because of their faith. I saw *The Butler* last week, a movie that tells the story of the Civil Rights movement and you see Martin Luther King and the church in the mix, risking, for justice, because of Christian faith. We just celebrated Halloween which is also the day Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses into a church door in Wittenburg, Germany, in 1517, protesting the abuses of the church and calling for thorough reform, sparking a movement that changed the course of history, cost many their lives, and led to that little band of pilgrims sailing for the new world seeking religious freedom and starting a way of practicing Christianity that would become known as Congregational. And of course, the first followers of Jesus, men and women, lived in a time when it was treason to proclaim Jesus as Lord, Son of God or Savior of the World, because those were titles reserved for Caesar. We remember that we stand on the shoulders of those who have taken great risk.

And on All Saints Sunday we remember saints who may not be famous but who are the most important saints to us. I think about my Grandma Beulah Bervig, a good Baptist, married to a Baptist preacher, who wasn't pleased that my sister and I were growing up in the United Church of Christ. I think about my Grandpa Lippert, who was reading the great German theologians on his own, for fun, because he always wanted to be a pastor but couldn't figure out how to leave the farm. We remember family and friends, mothers and fathers, beloved partners, sisters, brothers, children. And sometimes our

remembering is painful, our grief is still raw, or the grief comes back to visit us for a while. But hopefully this church is a place and this Sunday of all Sundays is a time when we can live as one person rather than two. God understands us and accepts us as we are. We don't need to pretend that we aren't hurting when we are, and trusting that God will be with us in the sadness, maybe we can just be with it rather than trying to distract ourselves and pretend that the sadness isn't there.

As we move towards Thanksgiving, we'll be discussing the Psalms, paying attention to how the Psalmists offer their gratitude to God, and paying attention to exactly what the Psalmists are thankful for. In today's Psalm, Psalm 103, the Psalmist is encouraging us to give thanks with our whole being, because God is forgiving, because God does justice, and because God is tender. God knows and remembers that we are human and that we live and die and hurt. "As tender as mother to child, so God is gentle to God's people." Despite what our good NRSV bibles say, there are scholars who argue that the Hebrew root here is best translated as motherly compassion, giving us a very powerful image of God. When a child scrapes a knee and goes running to her mother, the mother doesn't magically take the crying and pain away, but instead holds the child until the crying is done, holds the child until the pain fades, and the child can jump up and run and play and live again. The Psalm give thanks for a God who holds us in our hurt like a mother holding a child, holding us until the hurt is done and we can begin to live again.

As my heart has been with my friend and more mindful of the many times that we split into two people, hiding our hurt, the second of the Beatitudes started rolling in my head. The Beatitudes stretch our understanding of those who are blessed and offer an important affirmation. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are. Not, "woe to those who mourn," as if mourning is a part of life that can be avoided, or something that shouldn't be done. But, "blessed are." Blessed are those who mourn, who are not ashamed of their sadness and trust that God will hold them until the grieving is done. Blessed are those who find themselves mourning for longer than the world thinks it should take, God wants them to take the time they need. Blessed are those who did mourn, and who are surprised to find themselves mourning again at a birthday or a holiday or because of a beautiful memory. Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. They will find God's tender arms around them.

May we remember today. May we remember the sturdy shoulders on which we stand as people of Christian faith. May we remember the famous saints, and those saints who are in our hearts. And if the remembering hurts, may we trust that even in the hurt we rest in the care and blessing of God. Amen.