

All Saints Sermon
The Rev. Megan Dembi

I don't know how many people here keep up with the trends on social media. I will admit that I do not. But there is one trend that has showed up fairly recently that has caught my attention—a certain twitter hashtag that has become popular. For those who do not know, a twitter hashtag is a pound symbol followed by a word or phrase that people add on to the end of their tweets. Hashtags could signify an event or a topic. For instance, people tweeting about the historic game between the Cubs and the Indians used the hashtag “worldseries” at the end of their tweets. That way, people looking for tweets about the game could simply search for that hashtag. Well the hashtag that I noticed cropped up a while ago was a bit different, because it wasn't about an event or a specific topic. This hashtag was “blessed”. Hashtag blessed began showing up all over twitter and other social media a while ago. And you might think that this meant there was a resurgence of religious conversations happening on twitter. But that's not the case. Even nonreligious people are using this hashtag extensively. What does the use of this hashtag mean? Why has it become so important? Why is my priest talking about hashtags in a Sunday sermon?

The reason this hashtag is so interesting is that it gives us some insight into what people believe being blessed looks like. It shows what kinds of events in people's lives make them feel blessed. And if you search for popular tweets with the hashtag blessed, you'll see a huge variety, but most fall into a few basic categories. The biggest category is probably someone celebrating their sports team doing well. “The Cubs finally won the world series #blessed”. The second is personal accomplishments. “I got into my dream university #blessed”. The third is some other non-sports related event that happened in a person's own life. “Just saw Backstreet Boys in concert #blessed”. There are also people that use the hashtag when tweeting about something religious, and there are people who use the hashtag sarcastically, but by-and-large the hashtag is used when people are talking about something positive—something good happening in their own life or in the lives of others. And if we think about it, it is most likely in those times in our lives when a lot of good things are happening—we've gotten a better job, we've welcomed a new family member into the world, we've been able to go on a dream vacation—those are the times we're most likely to feel blessed.

We live in a world where being blessed means you have a high-paying job that commandeers a lot of respect. Where being blessed means your city's sports teams are the best. Where being blessed means your sick loved ones were cured of their illnesses and went on to run a marathon or start a charity. We look at sports stars, or wealthy reality tv stars, or people with a deadly illness who have beaten the odds and we say to ourselves “those people are truly blessed.”

Yet Jesus, the same Jesus who upholds tax collectors and condemns Pharisees, the same Jesus who said those who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted, once again turns our preconceived notions completely upside down. Blessed are you who are poor, blessed are you who are hungry, blessed are you who weep now, blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. You'd be hard-pressed to find tweets that reflect what Jesus is saying here. “Couldn't pay the mortgage this month #blessed”. “Can't afford to put food on the table for my family #blessed.” “My grandmother just died #blessed.” Yet it is in those moments, not the moments of happiness or accomplishment or relief or luck, that Christ calls us blessed.

It may seem counterintuitive to think that it is in our lowest moments that we are blessed. We humans, in our stubbornness, try to convince ourselves that we can be self-sufficient, that all we truly need in life is a strong work-ethic and a good head on our shoulders. And because of this, we can subconsciously turn away from God because we feel like we don't need God when things are going well in our lives, when we feel like we can rely on ourselves. Yet in those times we are at our

lowest lows, when something happens in our lives that we cannot control, if we turn to God in those times, we can feel that we are blessed. Because we can know that the sufferings of this world are temporary and that those things which seem to tear us apart from our loved ones will not last forever. Jesus does not just tell us blessed are you who are poor, blessed are you who are hungry, blessed are you who weep now, blessed are you when people hate you. He teaches us that all of the suffering that we face in this world will one day disappear. "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven."

We are blessed during these times because we know that God is with us in our sufferings, and we know that the pain of this world cannot be compared to the glory and joy in the next. We know that whatever may befall us in this life, in the next life we ourselves shall see God face-to-face and we will see our loved ones again. We know that whatever happens to us in this life, we are a part of the communion of saints, of the body of Christ, of the mystical communion of believers both living and dead. The so called blessings of this world cannot be compared with the true blessings that God bestows on us. And just as the world's blessings are not God's blessings, the ways of the world are not God's ways, or how God would have us live. Christ says to us, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you." If we live in this way, the world will not call us blessed, but we will be truly blessed. And we are constantly supported by the presence of God in our lives and the communion of all the saints, both the living and the dead. Let us embrace our blessings. Let us embrace our sainthood. Let us embrace the commission to which God has called us and live as Christ's body in this world and in the next. Amen.