

November 1, 2015
Isaiah 25: 6-9; Matthew 5: 1-16
Blessed Are...
Kerra Becker English

Most of you know that I read, a lot, so when I have multiple books stacked on my night table, it can be challenging to know where to start first. Sometimes I even end up with multiple bookmarked beginnings until I find that one book that I can't put down until it's finished. Recently, the book got me hooked from the very beginning was Nadia Bolz-Weber's latest called - *Accidental Saints*. My family teases me for reading so many, and I mean *so many* spiritual books, and this one in particular has that ring to it that it's talking about me, and to me, and through me, that is, if I were only a bit cooler and even more sarcastic than I am now. Nadia is not your typical Lutheran pastor. She's tattooed in the way that it's impossible not to notice. She lifts weights for fun and for spiritual vigor, and she has a speaking circuit as well as being the misfit pastor to a church full of misfits. I love her writing style because she writes about her beloved misfits in ways that are genuinely touching, and often really hilarious.

This book in particular is a celebration of such people, the *accidental saints*. She begins, and ends, her story on All Saints' Day. It is certainly a tribute to the people who have touched her life, and most of the time left her a better person for it. It would be both amazing and humbling to write such a book, and that's exactly how it reads. These are real life stories of real time moments, and therefore some names have been changed to protect the identities of those portrayed within, with the exception of reading about Nadia's own feelings and anxieties. Those are purposefully left raw for the reader to experience. But you probably didn't come here this morning just to hear a book review...

Nope, you came here to worship God. And one of the ways we offer God such worship is through preparing and/or hearing a sermon. We go directly to our holy book, open it up, and try to figure out something of what it is saying to us. That's a pretty good thing for us to do together. What I end up saying is one thing, what you hear may be another. Both are gifts back to God.

What I get to do that you *don't* get to do, at least not as often, is to experience the view I have from this particular place in the sanctuary. Your eyes, at least part of the time, are on me. But my eyes get to be focused on all of you, the accidental saints of Ashland Presbyterian Church. That's what struck me about the book as much as anything else was getting to overhear a pastor talk so lovingly about her people. She talked a lot about her flock, but she also talked about her friends, and her frenemies, those people that you really, really don't want to think have something to do with God and your life, but they do. They are the enemies Christ wants us to love, because it teaches us something more about the kind of love God has for us.

So today, I chose to read the same passage of scripture that Nadia reads to her congregation in Denver, every All Saints' Day – the beatitudes. These are the blessings given by Jesus to the poor, the persecuted, and the broken. They are the reminders that blessings come in strange packages. The things we thought would break us or kill us actually become the very things that make us holy. None of us are particularly good at working on our resume for sainthood. None of us would want to. Sainthood comes at too high a price. We'll take being a forgiven sinner any day over that. And yet, we find ourselves here, surrounded by people who have made a difference in our lives, who have made us better than we really were before.

That's what I think most folks fail to understand about "church." It's not a place for the already good people to sit around congratulating themselves on how awesome they are. If you think it's that, you might be in the wrong place. I find church to be the place that renews me

when I don't like myself, that helps me love again when I become unlovable. It also means that I have to reach out to folks in their unlovable states, which helps me be kinder and more merciful in other aspects of my own life. It doesn't always happen this way, but when the church is at its most real – we actually do become Christ for one another.

That's why today is heavily soaked in sacramental tones. We will remember our baptisms. We will attend the supper of our Lord. We need those things to heal us, especially when we are not all we want to be, or anywhere near what our people need us to be, or imagining the distance to where God thinks we should be.

And now I'm also going to read Nadia's list of blessings from the book, her own set of beatitudes, because it reads like a love letter to her congregation and because it's too good not to: (*Accidental Saints*, p. 184-188, skipping the ones with names that are relevant to having read the book)

Blessed are the agnostics.

Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised.

Blessed are they who are spiritually impoverished and therefore not so certain about everything that they can no longer take in new information.

Blessed are those who have nothing to offer.

Blessed are the preschoolers who cut in line at communion.

Blessed are the poor in spirit.

You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction.

Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears could fill an ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like.

Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried.

Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted anymore.

Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else.

Blessed are the motherless, the alone, the ones from whom so much has been taken. Blessed are those who "still aren't over it yet."

Blessed are those who mourn.

You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone at middle-school lunch tables.

The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex workers and the night-shift street sweepers.

Blessed are the losers and the babies and the parts of ourselves that are so small, the parts of ourselves that don't want to make eye contact with a world that loves only the winners.

Blessed are the forgotten.

Blessed are the closeted.

Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented.

Blessed are the teens who have to figure out ways to hide the new cuts on their arms. Blessed are the meek.

You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard, for Jesus chose to surround himself with people like them.

Blessed are those without documentation.

Blessed are the ones without lobbyists.

Blessed are the foster kids and trophy kids and special ed kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are they who know there has to be more than this, because they are right.

Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people.

Blessed are the burned-out social workers and the overworked teachers and the pro bono case takers.

Blessed are the kindhearted NFL players and the fundraising trophy wives.

Blessed are the kids who step between the bullies and the weak.

Blessed are they who hear that they are forgiven.

Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it.

Blessed are the merciful, for they totally get it.

November 1 – All Saints Day – Renewal of Baptism Vows/Eucharist

PROFESSION OF FAITH

Through baptism we entered the covenant God has established.
Within this covenant God gives us new life,
guards us from evil, and nurtures us in love.

In embracing that covenant, we choose whom we will serve, by turning from evil and turning to Jesus Christ. I ask you, therefore, to join me as we reject sin, profess our faith in Christ Jesus, and confess the faith of the church, the faith in which we baptize.

Do you renounce all evil, and powers in the world which defy God's righteousness and love?

I renounce them.

Do you renounce the ways of sin that separate you from the love of God?

I renounce them.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior?

I do.

Do you believe in God, the Father almighty?

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

Do you believe in Jesus Christ?

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.**

Prayer over the water _ IMPROV

Touching the Water and Reaching out to One Another _ Invite participation

***Hymn # ""**

Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Invitation to the Table - Kerra

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Kerra: The Lord be with you.

People: *And also with you.*

Kerra: Lift up your hearts.

People: *We lift them to the Lord.*

Kerra: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: *It is right to give God thanks and praise.*

Kerra: It is truly right and our greatest joy to give you thanks and praise O God, for you created us and have brought your people through many trials:

Abraham and Sarah, Miriam and Moses, Deborah and Isaiah, Peter and Mary, Francis of Assisi and Clare, Martin Luther, and John Calvin, and John Wesley, Martin Luther King, Jr., Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, and Mother Teresa – all attest to your providence and mercy and show us ways to live.

Melissa: Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor, power and might be to our God forever and ever!

Kerra: You came in human form to walk among us, teaching us the way to live as your children. In Jesus Christ you showed us what holy living looks like and gave us the sacraments of Baptism and Communion to remember and experience anew your presence, encouraging us to live in relationship to you.

Melissa: Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor, power and might be to our God forever and ever!

Kerra: In this meal we give you praise and thanks, Creator God as we remember all those who have passed from this life and now know the joys of life everlasting. Pour out your Spirit that this bread may be for us the bread of heaven and this cup, the cup of the new covenant in Jesus Christ. Bind us together by your Spirit as your holy people, washed by your Baptism and strengthened for holy living by this meal.

Melissa: Blessing and glory and wisdom, thanksgiving and honor, power and might be to our God forever and ever!

Kerra: As we reflect and remember, also hear us God as we pray to you the familial prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, saying, "Our Father..."

Blessing in the Memorial Garden:

David Coddington and Harold Starke

“See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

The Beatitudes

5 When Jesus^[a] saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely^[b] on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Salt and Light

¹³“You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

¹⁴“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. ¹⁵No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.