

Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

I've said this before, so it's nothing new, but each week – and sometimes each day – there seems to be more and more chaos in our world. Lately, for me, it's news about the effects of the government shutdown: SNAP benefits; expiring tax credits that will lead to skyrocketing healthcare costs; and a lack of unity among our national leaders.

The frustrating part is that it all seems to result in an “us” versus “them” scenario that's designed to keep us apart and in conflict with each other.

Even the words of Jesus in the gospel reading – the blessings and woes – seem like they just call out the divide without doing much to close the gap, or even eliminate it.

But reading those together with what comes next, we come to understand that Jesus isn't talking about division and everyone eventually switching places to one side or other of that divide. There's more to it than that.

This reading is a continuation of Jesus' inaugural sermon, that he gave in the Temple when he declared that God's Spirit had anointed him to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, sight to the blind, set free those who are oppressed, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

From there, he healed some people on the Sabbath, called the disciples, and has just finished praying on a mountain.

And even though all of this happens at the beginning of his ministry, people already know who Jesus is. Word is spreading. People are following him and seeking him out for healing and wisdom.

And this part of his teaching we read today is called the Sermon on the Plain. It's very similar to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's gospel. The biggest difference is location.

Instead of standing on a mountain, or the side of a mountain, and speaking down to the people as Matthew portrays it, Jesus has come down from the mountain to be with the people on a level place. It's a different perspective, right?

Even as he's speaking, Jesus is physically “in it” with the people who were there. And as he's there, the lines of division start to become blurred as his image of justice becomes more clear.

Because he isn't talking about one group of people experiencing one thing now, and a different group experiencing it in the future. Both are happening in that moment. And every time Jesus says "you" or "your" in this reading, it's plural. It's "all y'all."

So, as he speaks, Jesus asks what does it mean for y'all to be full while others are hungry. What does it mean to have wealth and advantages while others lack those things? What does it mean to have joy and laughter while others are weeping and grieving?

Bringing all of that together, recognizing that those things can and do exist alongside each other, levels the playing field – in a manner of speaking. And what that does is help us remember that we're all responsible for each other.

In other words...

My liberation is bound up in your liberation. Your wholeness is bound up in the wholeness of the people sitting across the room from you. The health of complete strangers is bound up in that of the people they walk past on the street. Our future, our security, is bound up the future and security of the people we serve in our partner ministries.

Jesus' vision of justice, our responsibility to and for one another, is the love Jesus calls us to have for others.

This depth of relationship and interdependency isn't a popular idea in some circles. Some have even said that it's weak – especially when it's held together with the rhetoric and messaging we're bombarded with in the news and on social media.

But there's a truth to it. ¹And as someone said in Bible study last week when we looked at this reading – Jesus' words here are necessary teaching. They're a roadmap for how to live. And everyone should be able to hear this and live by it.

What gets in our way, especially in the US with its emphasis on individualism, is that Jesus isn't talking about quid pro quo or living this way so that others treat you well.

When Jesus says, "love your enemies" and "do good to those who hate you," he means do these things without expecting anything in return. Do these things for the sake of love itself. That's at the root of the "golden rule." And that's the hard part.

¹ Eva Mader: October 28, 2025.

Because the way our society works, it's more like: I'll treat you well if you treat me the same. If you love me, I'll love you. I'll give you money now if you promise to repay me later. And so on.

But this isn't the way of love. Thinking of life as a series of "fair exchanges" reduces love to a transaction. And the love Jesus calls for here expects nothing in return. It gives for the sake of giving.

We call this kind of love "grace." And we usually think of grace as the undeserved, saving love of God – which it is. But it's also the love Jesus calls us to live out as human beings created in God's image.

When we live through that lens, the teachings of Jesus work. They make sense. When someone wrongs us, we don't seek retaliation – we forgive. We stop worrying about how others might treat us when we treat them well. We stop being consumed with fear over being taken advantage of. We don't manipulate each other to give us what we want. We don't coerce people to stay in unsafe situations.

We do what it takes to make sure everyone is fed, and that everyone knows they are loved. And we look forward; we look ahead to the world that that creates. A world shaped by the hope Jesus brings.

As we strive to live this grace, we look to the people for whom it seems to be second nature, who always seem to get it right. And on this particular Sunday, we remember the people – the saints – who showed us how to live this grace and who now rest with God.

We tend to think of saints as being superhuman somehow – as being extra faithful or more in tune with God – even the people we knew and loved in our own lives.

But the New Testament never uses the word "saint" to mean a "super faithful person." Because every saint from every time and place was a human being with needs and hopes, joys and sorrows, and who messed things up from time to time and asked for forgiveness – and received it. Like each of us.

And like each of us, as they lived they kept taking the next faithful step – and the next one, and the next one. And as they did, God's grace shaped them into the saints whom we loved and who loved us.

God's grace continues to shape each person so that, over time, the communion of believers – the communion of saints – takes on the character of God, the character of Jesus.

That community, that relationship, surrounds us each time we gather here. Their presence, their witness, helps us remember that in Jesus our divisions cease to exist. Because in Jesus, we are responsible to and for one another in all the emotions and life situations that exist alongside each other.

And as we faithfully follow the roadmap Jesus created for us, we learn – over and over again – that it is founded on love that gives for the sake of love itself. The grace that shapes how we live and who we become as people created in God's image.

Thanks be to God! Amen.