

November 5, 2017 **We Have a Gifted Life Through Christ** 1 John 3:1-3 Rev. Ross Leckie

One of the first set of ‘trick or treaters’ at our door Tuesday night was of course our Georgetown grandchildren, Cole, Madden, and Sawyer. We are certainly ‘blessed’ as a family. However, I was a bit challenged last week at the “Luther Legacies” seminar about the use of ‘blessed.’ Many of you will be familiar with the Beatitudes, the assigned gospel text for All Saints’ Day.

“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.” “You’re blessed when you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.”

Boy, that doesn’t sound blessed to me, does it you? Those are contemporary language versions of:

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

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

In our everyday realities we can too quickly attribute excellent health and even wealth to being ‘blessed’ by God. The logical corollary to this would be, those who experience hardship, ill health, poverty, and grief are somehow not ‘blessed’ by God. Surely, we do not want to believe in a God that operates in that way. I certainly do not wish to.

The second caller on Tuesday was none other than Zeva, accompanied by her dad, Scott. Scott and his wife, Doreen are one of our neighbours. They were unable to conceive a child on their own. Zeva gets special attention from us on such nights for she is an adopted child of God in a sense that becomes more evident to me each day that I see her. Scott and Doreen decided that they would adopt a child. As you know adopting a child within Canada, these days, leads to a long waiting period. They decided to do an international adoption, hence bringing Zeva home. Zeva was, I believe, in an orphanage in the Ukraine. She had some learning deficits and remained at the orphanage for a number of years. We think Zeva is now about 11 years of age. She is ‘blessed’ to have a caring set of parents, one a teacher, one a tradesman. We have seen her develop through the years and we have seen the wonderful patience that her dad shows with her. I think God has blessed this couple and brought out the best in Doreen and Scott, as parents of this precious girl with unique needs.

From our epistle reading today we read, “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. We are part of God’s family. We are ‘children of God.’”

In the Roman world adoptions took place, but it was not about compassion for orphans. In fact, many people were adopted as young adults or adults. Adoption was about *inheritance* and *name*. Often a man was adopted to carry on the name of a childless family. The adopted son would sever ties to the old family and this would include relief of any debt owed under the name of the old family. He would

Zeva and her parents are a reminder to me, we are adopted as God’s children by the work of the ‘Spirit’. We have a spiritual inheritance that entitles us to all the blessings (not worldly blessings mind you) and benefits, privileges and powers, that relationship implies. Along with being nurtured and motivated in our spiritual growth, we also have the privilege of knowing God’s promises and presence in times of difficult struggle and need. The practicality of that gets worked through in our communities of faith.

Our primary Christian identity as God’s children is both a gift and a commitment to live so that others, seeing our love (agape) for one another, will recognize the God we worship. This countercultural nature of Christian identity, this love, though abiding within this community of the beloved is a source of renewal for us as a congregation. That is, though living in a world,

culture, and nation, we are called to identify less with what the world has to offer and instead live and project our reality of being ‘adopted children of God.’ Such is a call to holiness in general and intentional ethical caring behaviours in particular. Thus we are called to show respect, thanksgiving, avoiding malicious gossip and other false witness.

All Saints’ Day is a time when as the family of faith, children of God and joint heirs with Christ, we not only bear each other’s burdens but also claim for those who have died the hope and confidence we have together in the risen Christ. Because we have a belief that Christ died for the world and rose again, we have this hope of victory over sin and the grave. Writer Edward Young once wrote, “Because of the love of Christ, nothing is dead but that which wished to die; nothing is dead but wretchedness and pain. What remains for us is a legacy of loyalty, of love, and of life.”*

I invite you today to reflect on how blessed we are by the loyal witnesses who have been our teachers, our mentors, our critics (who also taught us important things), and our encouragers who enabled us to grow and mature in our faith. Their legacy includes a countless number of faithful witnesses who have taught us to know and believe the good news of the Word of God. In time we have learned that in times of trials and difficult decisions the witness of faith shared with us by our mentors continues to provide incredible strength, not only for our own benefit, but also for our witness to others.

In the book of Hebrews 11:4 the writer tells us that “Abel (brother of Cain) has died , but through his faith he is still speaking.” Our legacy as children of God is to remember that, even though our loved ones have died, through their love and compassion, their instruction and correction, their laughter and tears, their honesty and humility, their sacrifice and dedication, and, most of all, their faith, they are still speaking.

Last week on the cbc program, the Current, there was an interview with a family originally from Pakistan, a Muslim couple, who became US. citizens 30 years ago. Khizr Khan, a lawyer, spoke up against racism and discrimination, by holding up a copy of the United States constitution at a rally, during last year’s American presidential race. Khizr grew up under a repressive, authoritarian regime. In contrast, in his early years of work, the first American employer he had treated him with such kindness he was overwhelmed. When his family came to the continental US, once again he was overwhelmed with the generosity and kindness of those he met. He attributes that to the nature of the American constitution. Khizr and his wife, Rhazalla are the parents of Captain Humayun Khan who was killed in the line of duty at the age of 27, while serving in Iraq.

The role Captain Humayun played was commanding a group of military who secured the entrance and exit from a camp in Iraq. One morning he came out early to check on things before duty and he notices a fast moving car approaching the security gate. He began to wave the car down, knowing there was a possibility of a terrorist, but also hoping that it was just someone who had gotten lost and didn’t realize they were heading toward a military camp. He did not command his sentry forces to shoot. Instead he moved even closer to the middle of the roadway and extended his arms straight trying to stop the vehicle. But this caused the driver to prematurely detonate the intended bomb blast. Captain Khan lost his own life in the protection of others.

Khizr says we/they continue to live under the grace and light that he left. Mother, Rhazalla responds when anyone mentions the loss of her son, “Humayan lit a candle and the rest of the world now continues to light their candle from his, created from the grace, grace of caring for others, that was his character.” In the first couple of years after his death, his mother would not

enter the room where a large potrait of Humayan is displayed. It was too painful for her. Sometimes people would ask Rhazalla, how do you feel about all of this, the circumstances of his death. Her response is this, "why do these people ask me this question, he is not gone anywhere, he is with me all the time." Khizr is being interviewed and he says, perhaps only other gold star mothers can relate, she says, "Why do they ask that question, he has not gone anywhere, for her." I find that witness of a mother for a modern day saint, quite compelling. "Those who love beyond this world are never separated." "Death cannot kill what never dies."

A man was sitting on a park bench, appreciating nature, reading his Bible. An older man came and sat beside him. When the older man saw that he was reading the Bible, he extended his hand in introduction and said, "I too have life!" We are blessed children of God, held together by a legacy of life, found in the common relationship through the risen Christ. "Thanks be to God, who gives us the legacy through Our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor. 15:57)

Amen.

*Acknowledging inspiration from Feasting on the Word, Bartlett and Brown Taylor ed., 2011, p.230-5

CBC radio, the Current, October 24, 2017