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When I was a kid growing up, my father had a strange way of waking my three brothers and me on Sunday mornings. We lived in a rather small house. My father built that house himself before he and my mom were married. My dad's with the Lord now. He died almost six years ago; but my mom still lives in that same house, sixty-seven years later.

Every Sunday, for years and years, my dad would wake us all up to get ready to go to church. He'd stand on the narrow stairs outside our rooms, and he'd bellow out a song. It was either the first lines of our opening hymn today, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty! Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee," or from the musical *Oklahoma*, "Oh, what a beautiful mornin'! Oh, what a beautiful day! I've got a beautiful feeling, everything's goin' my way!" And every Sunday morning, my brothers and I would moan and groan at the torture of being awakened like this. It's a vivid memory, but now an incredibly happy one.

Every year, this day, All Saints Day, triggers some great memories like that of my father, who's now among the saints of God. My Dad is one of those believers forgiven by the blood of the Lamb, dwelling in God's eternal home of heaven.

This is now my sixth All Saints Day since he died. The first couple of All Saints Days were not so easy for me. Some of the emotions stirred were more painful. I was feeling the loss of my Dad more sharply. My grief was more raw. Six years down the road, that wound still aches sometimes, but not nearly as often.

Plenty of you know exactly what I'm speaking of, don't you? Many of you today are wincing from those painful, sharp, raw grief wounds. Some among us today are going through an awfully hard, agonizing season of mourning. All Saints Day is a great day, but not always an easy one.

Even for Christians, losing a loved one is hard. Even for believers and churchgoers who trust in what God has to say about life after death, and salvation by grace through faith, it still hurts to have to let go of a loved one. We all face it at times, but let's be honest. Grief is awful. Mourning can be terrible.

And then we hear the voice of Jesus, our Lord. What does he say about it? From the Gospel reading, Matthew 5:4, printed on your bulletin cover, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Read that with me again out loud. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Blessed? Blessed are those who mourn? We all know that mourning is tough. Mourning challenges us, shakes us up, breaks us down, pushes us sometimes way past our limits. Blessed? Blessed are those who mourn?

Jesus tells us, "They shall be comforted." Jesus offers a blessing today on all of us who are grieving and mourning. He says, "You are among the blessed." See, God doesn't just value those who are smiling and happy, the well-dressed and successful, the psychologically strong and the emotionally stable. God cares deeply about those who are down and out. God values, and blesses, the poor in spirit, the meek, the persecuted, and – in verse 4 – those who mourn.

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

We don't always feel blessed. We don't always feel comforted, when we're mourning. And Jesus doesn't promise instant comfort, and immediate relief from all our symptoms of grief. But Jesus promises real comfort, genuine comfort; a deep, internal, everlasting comfort.

It's the comfort, first of all, of God's care. Jesus' blessing of those who mourn is a strong statement that God is aware of what we're going through. He cares about your mourning. He's not ignoring it today. He's not unsympathetic. God cares, and that's a comfort. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

It's the comfort, also, of God's promise. Jesus' words to those who mourn remind us that we are promised forgiveness through faith in his death and resurrection, and we are promised a new life after death, promised eternal reunion with loved ones who've gone before us in the faith, promised never-ending life in the loving presence of our God. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”

And it's the comfort, finally, of God's family. I know that All Saints Day isn't an easy day to be in church, for some of us. Many of us are missing specific loved ones, and wishing we were still in their company. But let's thank God today that we are in the company of loved ones. These pews are filled with people who love you, as a sister or brother in Christ. We don't pretend that we're not grieving and missing our loved ones who've died. But we can also be thankful for the company of saints – for God's people, for God's family -- gathered around us today.

Today, All Saints Day, we celebrate the “communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” That’s part of our Creed, our statement of faith, isn’t it? And it’s my favorite part. I love talking about God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; but one of my favorite parts of the whole worship service is when we stand together to proclaim our participation in the “communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.” What a blessing it is to be part of all that today, to be here today with all of you! What a comfort the family of God is!

May God bless you and keep you, this All Saints Day. May God give you his comfort through Christ – the comfort of his care, the comfort of his promise, the comfort of his family – today and forever. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Amen.