First Congregational UCC
November 1, 2026
Rev. Nick Hatch
“Blessed”; Matthew 5:1-12

Let us Pray: Blessing God, may we celebrate the holy path we travel. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, oh our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

When I knocked on the door his wife welcomed me for a visit. She was sitting in a chair pulled tight to the hospital bed, her head resting on his chest, gently stroking his hands and softly speaking words. You would have thought they were having an intimate cup of coffee on any normal day, minus the great apparatus of machines keeping his body alive.

I pulled a chair close. She never moved her head. We began to talk.

They had grown up in a small town together, never noticing one another until high school when they fell in love. They decided to remain in their hometown to share their children with their parents who also both lived there. To sustain this, they ended up carving out a life delivering papers, thousands and thousands of papers a week. She would be up in the middle of the night folding, then he would load them into their car and head out. Sometimes she would ride with him and they would visit. She talked about their life, their hardships, their children, and then about their marriage. I will never forget her calm, sincere words:

“All I can tell you pastor is how blessed I am, blessed to have had this man for over thirty years. He loved me like nobody has every loved me. I know that for now we will be apart, but I just know we will see one another again.”

Her spirit was a mixture of grief and trust, tranquility and trauma, hemmed with unbelievable gratitude. I felt humbled in her midst. She was a profoundly faithful person; the living embodiment of our scripture:

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

On this All Saints Day, whom do you recall that embodies the presence of the Living Word of God?

In the Gospel of Matthew, we find Jesus giving his inaugural address to his disciples, The sermon on the mount. Modeled within the Jewish tradition of following the Law in Torah, Jesus draws heavily from Psalm one, known as the great Law Psalm, which begins:

Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.

Here the Psalmist takes seriously the importance of our choices in remaining obedient to God's ruling principles. The Psalmist teaches that along our journey two ways open up. We face a split in the path. And we must choose the way "walking by" Yahweh's gift of the Torah. The implication is that scripture will give us the signposts we need to make our choices; drop way points to keep us on the straight path; direct us in our daily and life-long travels.

Much later on, in Matthew chapter seven, Jesus took up the psalmist's idea saying

""Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Jesus's warning underscores the seriousness of our travels. Yet both the Psalmist and Christ also claim that obedience to the way of God - is comprehendible, even straightforward. God does not purposefully confound us on all fronts. God promises to us clarity and simplicity. Yes, life and faith are a deep mystery to ponder - even Jesus went up to the mountain alone to pray and meditate. But God has given shape to what is good and righteous, and make manifest Jesus will for us God's child-disciples.

In Psalm 1 the Hebrew word translated "blessed" is *ASHAR,* which literally means "to find the right road, to advance, to go straight, or lead on." Consider how this reframes Jesus Sermon on the Mount for us for us.

- On the straight path are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- On the right road are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- Leading and advancing us all are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

What a revealing interpretation of Jesus's claims of "blessing." How challenging and frightening it can be for us who have chosen other roads. How blunt to hear such specific proclamations of lasting happiness, consecrated hardships, and exalted paths.
One scholar says:

Each of the nine blessings calls upon (us) to make a discovery, and each calls (us) not only to a change of attitude but to concrete steps in (our) faithfulness. – Earl F. Palmer

I wonder what invitation you hear in Jesus statements of blessing?

In the early Christian tradition, All Saints Day began as an invitation to mark the anniversary of a martyr's death. Our Reformed Tradition has taken on a more

wholistic approach, emphasizing the sanctification of the whole people of God. We still give thanks for the lives of particular giants of our faith, but we do not place them on a pedestal holy and set apart. Rather, we give glory to God for the ordinary, holy lives of the believers in this and every age.

Today we recognize the blessings of our Living God in scripture saying “Ashar, Ashar” are they who have shown us the way. “Blessed, blessed” are we who labor on. “Happy, Happy” are those who meditate upon your law both day and night - most Holy God.

With a mixture of grief and comfort, we welcome the intimate presence of God. With quiet reverence we consider the invitations that our Saints have issued to us. We pray that we all may be counted among the company of the faithful in God’s eternal realm.

In doing all this, we give glory to our:

Living God, in whom there is no shadow or change,
we thank you, God, for the gift of life eternal,
and for all those who, having completed their baptisms,
now rest from their labors.

Katherine

We thank you for all the saints remembered and forgotten,
for those dear souls most precious to us.
Today we give thanks for those members of our community
who during the last twelve months
have died and entered into glory.