

God grant us serenity to accept the things that we cannot change. Courage to change the things that we can and the wisdom to know the difference in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Please be seated

If any of you have ever done couples counseling before, you may be familiar with the term harsh startup. A harsh startup is when your partner is trying to communicate something to you, and it might actually be a really important thing and it might be filled with love, but they start with some words that are so jarring to your ears that you miss everything else that they say after that, a harsh startup.

This I think is what it is like many times for Christians, when Jesus speaks, a harsh startup. The blessed or the poor thing is fine we don't mind hearing that, that doesn't bother us. We think, isn't that nice? Blessed who are hungry. Blessed are those who cry. Really it just sounds like he's describing the babies who are going to be baptized today, crying, poor, hungry. That's about the same deal, right?

But when he starts to get to the part where he says, Woe, to you who are rich and woe to you who are full and woe to you, who are laughing and woe to you, who, when people speak well of you, all of us, all of a sudden there's something inside of us that shuts down. Mainly because most of us are richer than anyone in the vast majority of human history.

Even those of us who feel like we're struggling in the current economy are in a place of relative stability that the people of Jesus time could not possibly comprehend. And many of us are doing even better than that. So whenever we hear Jesus say these words, first of all, I hear so many people go, Oh, I got it. So poor people are going to heaven and rich people are going to hell. Great. And we immediately sort of shut down. Except Jesus doesn't talk about heaven in hell here. And this is a misunderstanding that we have because of the harshness of Jesus words, because of the intensity of the thing he's trying to communicate to us.

We oftentimes sort of say, we sort of write Jesus off. We don't wanna admit that we do that, but we'll write Jesus off as sort of a religious idealist who says these things we couldn't possibly live into. So isn't it nice that he said them, but I have a life to live here and now. But Jesus doesn't say, these people go to heaven and these people go to hell.

In fact, what Jesus teaches is so consistent with everything that we hear Jesus say throughout the Gospel according to Luke, and we've heard it throughout this year, if you've been with us, you've heard this over and over again, which is Jesus continuously trying to blow up this sort of false binary into which we live.

Wealth means stability and goodness and poverty means instability. And the people who experience that are bad, and we don't want to be like them, we want to be like this. He says over and over again that our concept of earthly wealth and stability is false. That the desire we have to create some kind of way that we can live that will never have to worry again, and we will deserve it. And that'll prove that we're good.

He says that actually is false and doesn't work, and the only thing that matters, the only real wealth is the eternal wealth, the unending wealth of the love that we share and the love that we carve out in this world with one another to make relationships of love and care with one another and to create a community. Yes, a society that embodies the love that proves and acknowledges the dignity of every single human being, this is the work. And the reality is that if we're focused on trying to make sure we

are wealthy enough or full enough or happy enough or well regarded enough, when we focus only on that, we have the capacity to ignore each other.

We have the capacity to see each other only as either obstacles that get in our way or people that might help us on our way up. Jesus continuously seeks to explode that idea, to ruin it, so that we might turn towards each other and recognize the presence, the belovedness, the belonging of every single person right in front of us.

What is getting in the way of you experiencing God's presence in the person right in front of you?

For me, I have a hard time experiencing the presence of people right in front of me when they believe different things than I believe, vote differently, act differently, or just get on my nerves. I have a long list of ways that I cannot not see God in you. And this is part of the problem.

I see the people around me as only reflecting God's presence when they're acting the way I want them to act or living the way I want them to live. And this is a shallow understanding of God. And at its core, one of the, one of the most problematic things about being a people who seek wealth and security in earthly ways, and to be well regarded because deep down we think if we do those things, we will finally be worthy of love as if we could ever be worthy of love, as if that's how love works.

We're chasing something we're never going to catch, which is that we can somehow secure our own belovedness by living just right. By accumulating the right amount, by becoming the right kind of person in the eyes of those around us, it doesn't work. So, Jesus turns our attention towards one another, look towards each other, and see blessing and look towards people you have historically ignored and marginalized and see blessing.

You know, we love to make this whole Christian thing about what will be someday, right? How we'll get to heaven someday, we hope. Today we observe the Feast of All Saints and we remember the people who have died, who came before us, and we think of those who are saints, as those who have died.

That's how we think. Except every time the word saints is used in our scriptures, this word saints, the set apart ones, the ones who are sanctified. It's actually just describing anyone who's been baptized, which means you don't have to die to be a saint right now living as you are, you are a saint. And I know what you're saying, Oh, I couldn't possibly be a saint. Not me. Friends, it's not a compliment. I'm not telling you you're a good person. This is part of the problem with sainthood, we think it's reserved for people who aren't us, but the reality is every single one of us in this space is being set apart to do the work of love and justice in this world right now.

That's who we are. We're baptizing six people today, and when we baptize them, we are setting them apart for the work of love and mercy, peacemaking, and justice in this world. That's what we are doing and that's what we are called to do. It's who we are. This isn't about what will be, it's about what God is doing right now.

This is so difficult for us to comprehend. I think about these six young lives that we're celebrating today as we bring them into the life of this church. And the thing that I always think is amazing about, about young children is how we treat them, which is like less than people, right? We treat children like, what are you going to be when you're older?

That's the most interesting thing to so many people about children, the promise of what will be. I hear people who think they're well intentioned say, oh, the children are the future of the church. No, they're the present of the church. They're not the future. They're here right now. They're not our future. They're the present. But we have this tendency to look at everything as what could be, or might be, or will be, when right here and now these people are blessing us. The people that we love who have died that we now call Saints. Did they walk around on Earth acting like what we would consider Saints acting like then?

Be honest, we love them in their death. When they were alive, were they perfect? That's not how sainthood works. It's not about perfection. It's about responding to the love that God has placed within you and sharing that love with the world around you, however imperfectly you can. However imperfect you are, we recognize our sainthood.

Every single one of us. We proclaim it. Not as saying we're all good, but as saying, we are all, every single one of us loved. And we are set apart in this world to share and spread that love to help it grow, to participate with God in the reconciliation of this world.

What would it look like if we saw these ones around us as not as what they will be, but what as they are right now, how they bless us currently?

What if I could see my neighbor who is experiencing homelessness, not just as a project? Someone to fix or someone to ignore. But as someone who is blessed by God right now and blesses me with their being, not for what they could or would be, but for who they are? What if I can learn more about who God is by connecting more deeply with the people around me that I have tended to ignore? Disagree with, walk away from.

And if I can recognize God's presence there in the imperfect face of my neighbor, I may even be able to see God's presence in myself. The hardest thing, I think for all of us to recognize God's presence, God's love, God's heart within ourselves. This is the work of the Christian. What does it look like? It's not a mystery.

Jesus says to anyone who will listen, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat, do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you.

And if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask them again, do to others as you would have them do to you. This is the basic instruction of the saint's life. We will live it. However imperfectly we will seek to live it. And if you think this sounds difficult, if you think this sounds impossible, try sticking in your little binary of trying to have just enough to be secure and be okay in this world and act like that actually works.

It doesn't work friends. Allow Jesus to destroy that binary and allow us to be liberated to love one another. To love one another for who we are and not for who we wish we. Allow yourself to recognize your own belonging and the belonging of the person right in front of you so that all of us with the communion of the Saints may participate with God in the work of love.

That is God's kingdom here and now, in Jesus name. Amen