

“Beatitudes” by Cynthia Dahlin

November 1, 2020



All Saints Day

Today is All Saints Day. This is the day that Seekers take time to honor those who have died during the year, and sometimes, we install new tiles on the Seekers Memory Wall in honor of loved ones who have passed on in this past year or in years past, but for whom we want a place of remembrance.

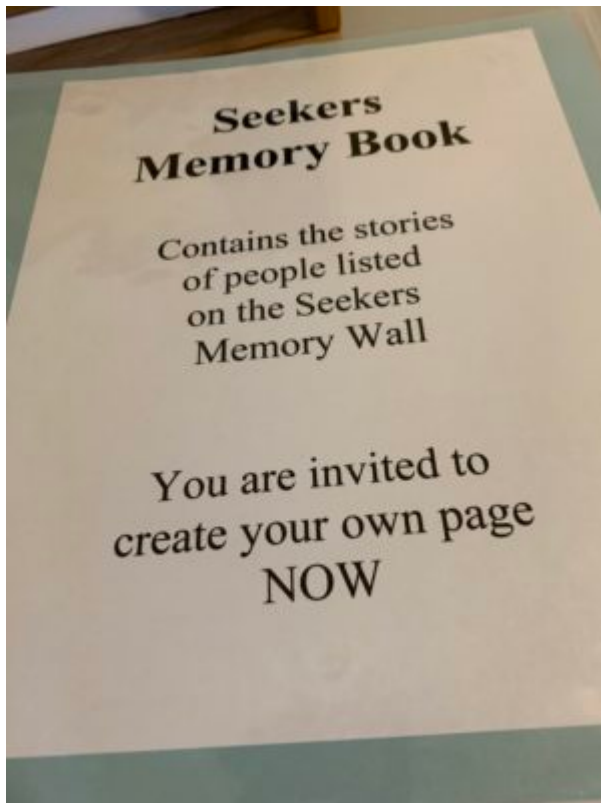
When I was at Seekers a couple of weeks ago for the Black Lives Matter demonstration, I took a picture of the tiles on the wall, which is on the back stairway between the lower floor and sanctuary floor, to remind us of the names that are there, and of the many spaces left for those of us who will be remembered in the future. We are not adding a tile this year. but I am asking Deborah to slowly show the current wall so that we can hold a moment of silence for those we have honored

and still remember. If there is someone you are thinking of today, I invite you to put their name in the chat box so we can hold all of these people we loved in prayer.





Living Water mission group organizes installing tiles, and next year, I am sure we will be adding a tile for Kenny Shaw, who died Thursday, as he chose Seekers for his spiritual family, and many Seekers cared for him throughout his years with us and through his dying. This is not a memorial service for Kenny—it is being planned with coordination among his family and many Seekers who were also his family, and details will be announced as they are ready. I will reflect on this week's scriptures and the idea of All Saints as it applies to all of us.



Living Water also carries the responsibility of adding pages to the Seekers Memory Book. This is a picture of the Memory Book, with rests on a fold-out stand at the top of the back staircase, beside the Memory Wall.

This book is meant to allow each Seeker to describe their own life and vocations and their relationship to the Seekers, with words, pictures or art, as they like, on both sides of a 12" x 12" piece of cardstock paper. If you want to use some of your pandemic time to describe yourself, you can always write you text and select your pictures and wait to get paper from me—I am currently holding the Memory Book materials for Living Water, or send your writings and pictures to me—and even draw a sketch of how you want them laid out, and I'll put it together for you.

This week we have some of the most beautiful words in the Bible, the Beatitudes. They define what Jesus meant when he wanted us to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. And, it explains the confusing reversals of having the least at the head of the table and richest left outside the feast in many

other stories.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. What does this mean to you? I think we are poor in spirit when we have experienced the loss of someone good or very young and it doesn't seem fair. Or when the system seems stacked against us. Some of us feel this now, when government seems bent on making the rich richer and making property crimes life sentences or directly causing death. Jesus says "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This is reassuring, but I think it also means we have the responsibility, through our daily actions of kindness to make this kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted. Comforted by a belief in heaven, comforted by the caring acts of those who speak about the dead loved ones, comforted by the common humanity of mourning together. I hope we are all comforting Trish, Pat, Paul, Alvin and all of those who were caring for Kenny, as well as comforting those who have had friends or relatives who were stricken with COVID, or died during this pandemic and had to experience a new kind of mourning on Zoom. I feel like I got to know more about Claire and Rebecca through the services of mourning they shared that many of us might not have had access to in "the real world."

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the world. This is what I think about when I work at N Street. Most of the women aspire to a tiny place on the planet—one private room—as an ultimate goal. Out of the weather, out of a large shelter dorm, one small space of their own. I pray that as they each grow sober, more healthy and gain access to education and jobs, or just Social Security benefits from access to legal help, they will feel like they have inherited a place in the world.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. This statement is the one which gave me hope when I was younger. Seekers is a community of people who

each have found a way to seek justice and mercy. When we used to gather for Circle Time, the projects and events would always go overtime—with many excellent efforts overlapping each other in date and time—people constantly repeated “all Seekers, all the time.” This beatitude has helped me center as I get older, and I hope it does you, too. We all hunger for righteousness, we all find our call and niche, and we don’t have to be frenetic. We can stop and take a walk together, have a birthday celebration together, make community. We can be filled.

Blessed are the merciful. I think this one was a new one—trying to help original Christians get used to a God of loving community, and to try to help us worry less about the judgement side of God. This beatitude seems relevant today with a leader who wants to lead our country with fear. Leading with love is a lot harder—teaching and correcting behavior, and giving new chances to those who have erred is harder than just locking them up. One has to watch, discuss, explain. Mercy in getting rid of mass incarceration will take some effort in our country. My son, Connor, works on getting people out of prison into programs with rehabilitation, with mental health services and with entry level jobs to help make that first resume entry. Did you know that during the pandemic, Amazon driving is a key entry job, and perfect for newly released people as every package is tracked and drivers can build up resumes proving that nothing went missing and their performance improved as they built up experience.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. I hope you each can form a mental picture of someone you feel is pure of heart. These people are loving centers of our lives. If you wish—I will let you break the norm of using the chat box, and I will give you a minute to share the name of someone pure in heart who gives you that bit of inspiration you need in life.

(PAUSE)

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God. This is perhaps the most complicated one for those of us who live in Washington. My father was Counsel to the Military Operations Subcommittee in the House of Representatives, and the Government Operations Committee, which had responsibilities for budgeting for weapons. I know that often someone has to have strength to give peace to others—I have broken up fights in my life, and have stood up to bullies. But this is one beatitude we have to try to work on—we all have anger and jealousy and hate in our lives at bad moments. I confess to my spiritual director when I am thinking of something mean, and I feel she holds me accountable to being a better person. We have to try to be peacemakers—I think this is harder and more specific than just being loving.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. This statement was quite literal in the first century of the Jesus church as they were ignoring the Roman temples, part of the state. And perhaps because of this phrase, the first saints were martyrs, only after several centuries were Catholic sainthoods given for gifts of giving and caring. Today, we need to say this and use it to act to help or support those who are persecuted, as in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way, they persecuted the prophets who were before you. I think the important thing here is that there is no call to insult and persecute your opponents, no harm those who do not believe exactly what you believe. This toleration, or even acceptance is a key part of how we operate as Seekers, trying to combine the best parts of all kinds of spirituality into our basic Christian structure. This is what this season's reflection statement from Richard Rohr in our liturgy

meant: "That is what Jesus did: he did not return the negative energy directed at him—not during his life nor when he hung on the cross. He held it inside and made it into something much better. That is how he 'took away the sin of the world.' he refused to pass it on!"

The wonderful words of the beatitudes, which are so calming and powerful are key to naming us all as saints—everyone has some of these attributes. One skill we need to learn and practice is to name and call each other saints.