Today’s readings would seem to be a celebration of how we—all the saints, the elect, those marked by the Holy Spirit—are different from, and better than, those other people. And if not “we,” then certainly how “they,” the named, identified saints, are different from, and better than . . . well, all of us who are not those saints.

On this celebration of All Hallows’ Day I am haunted by that line from Nadia Boltz-Weber which I quoted two weeks ago: “Every time we draw a line between us and others, Jesus is on the other side of it.”

Today’s readings, at least at first glance, would seem to be all about line-drawing, even that beautiful passage from Luke’s gospel, the beatitudes. In Luke’s version there are not only the blessed, but also the woeful. There’s that line again.

Instead of trying to talk myself out of that perception, I’ve decided to allow it to work on me, in me. One thought that occurred to me (perhaps inspired me) is this: When Jesus draws those lines, they’re never static. I’m not positive that’s true, but indulge me for a moment here. His view of those who do good and are faithful doesn’t waver. They/we are always accepted, always loved, down to our toes. (Except we know that we are not always doing good, not always being faithful. And, side note here: that doesn’t seem to keep us from being loved. More about that in a minute.)

So let’s switch back to third-person pronoun here for the time being: “They” seem to be the same ones we identify as the “elect” in our collect, that Daniel calls “the holy ones,” “the faithful” in Psalm 149. Paul calls them simply “the saints,” those marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit.

And in Jesus’ sermon list—let’s pay particular attention here—they are the dispossessed and the abused. Writing that prompted me to think of some lines from one of my favorite Paul Simon songs, “American Tune:” I don’t know a soul who’s not been battered/ I don’t have a friend who feels at ease/ I don't know a dream that’s not been shattered/ or driven to its knees.”

I know how bleak that sounds, but read in light of Jesus’ words of blessing to the poor, the hungry, those who weep, the reviled, they seem to say that the Lord’s blessings extend to all of us. Because at some time at least part of that list applies to each of us. And the us, I fervently believe, is not just the “us” gathered here, or in Quaker meetings or Roman Catholic basilicas on this day or mosques or temples, but all of us, all of God’s children.

And Jesus’ condemnations of the woeful (the “woe-to-you”s) doesn’t seem to me to condemn them as static entities incapable of change, but of their behavior, even if it’s momentary.

What if there were no line? What if we’re all—in our essence, which is after all the image of God—okay?

A few days ago in a meeting I regularly attend, one of the participants described a spiritual experience she’d had many years ago. She was working on a difficult task—one that requires much soul-searching. After weeks of preparation she was still concerned that she had been thorough enough, had recalled everything she should have . . . and suddenly in the midst of this mental handwringing she heard a voice above and behind her. She knew it was not her voice, nor her idea, and what she heard was, “You are okay. There never was a time when you weren’t okay (even at your lowest). And you will always be okay.” And, she said, “And that ‘okay’ felt like love.”

I was looking online for some examples of non-Christian saintly people and came across an article by an Episcopal priest in São Paulo, Brazil. This derailed my intended search—for Gandhi and others, but it speaks to the same point. Father Dass and his wife minister to the street children there, heading up an effort called “São Paulo Mercy Ministry.” It caught my eye particularly since I belonged to that diocese for almost three years in the 1980s. The whole article is amazing, but this captures the spirit of it, I believe:

Father Dass writes: “I know that many Protestants have a hard time comprehending the idea of saints. I guess that they were a little confused with the way they are presented. I agreed. Saints are transformed into someone ‘holy and righteous.’ This does not do justice to the saints themselves. Most of them did what they loved. They were not trying to be someone special or better than others. They loved God and they allowed God’s love to shine through what they did.”

What if we could see each other, and every other person, and humanity as a whole, as saints? All of us as children of the one and irreducible creative force who is our common parent, making us all truly brothers and sisters, capable of allowing God’s love to shine through what we do?

Taken as a whole, Jesus’ teaching points toward our being faithful to that ideal. “Do unto others as you would have them to do you” strikes me as a universal prayer for loving behavior.

It is a call to sainthood. No, more like a recognition of sainthood, that we are all okay, always. Never unloved by God, never cast out into outer darkness. Each of us, child of God, is called to show forth the beauty of God’s love in the world. And the saints, whose day it is, remind us of that truth. + + +