

January 29, 2023
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 5:1-12 (1 Corinthians 1:18-31)

BLESSED ARE YOU!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text for meditation today comes from the Gospel according to St Matthew, the 5th chapter, which you heard read earlier.

Our Gospel text this morning is popularly known as the *Beatitudes*. The word *beatitude* is not found in the English Bible but is derived from the Latin word for *blessed* or *blessings*. The word *blessed* is frequently used by Christians and for good reason.

In the original language the word *blessed* means: *fortunate, happy, privileged*. (BDAG, 611) But when Jesus uses the word *blessed* in our text, it means something much greater. As often happens when translating from the original language into English, much can be lost. In his Concordia Commentary, Jeffery Gibbs writes that in the Beatitudes, the word order and grammar:

“... has strong connotations of present and future salvation. It does not mean ‘happy,’ but something much stronger, tantamount to “saved.” (Gibbs, Matthew 1:1–11:1, 234)

A few pages later Gibbs writes:

“... the emphatically positioned μακάριος, “blessed,” in Matthew’s Gospel is virtually the equivalent of ‘saved’ or ‘redeemed...” (Gibbs, Matthew 1:1–11:1, 239)

In our text, Jesus leaves the crowds aside and sits on the mountain and teaches His disciples with the opening words of His Sermon on the Mount. His disciples are not limited to the Twelve but to all who have heard His call to repentance and have come to faith in Him. (cf: Matthew 4:17) And that includes you and me. No one becomes Jesus’ disciple by their own reason or initiative.

Jesus is the Word become flesh bringing the reign and rule of God into the world to remove all sin, destroy every evil and the devil, and restore creation to its original harmony and holiness. He calls sinners to faith by the proclamation of His life-saving Gospel. Working through the Word the Holy Spirit creates faith in stone-cold unbelieving hearts. Then and only then can people believe in, trust, and follow Jesus.

By your God given faith, you are a disciple of Jesus. In His Sermon on the Mount Jesus is teaching you and all believers what it looks like to live as a disciple of Christ. We Lutherans call it the Third Use of the Law, using the Law as a *rule* or *guide* to describe how you are to live a Christlike life, bearing fruits of faith, performing good works and deeds, and giving tithes and offerings that flow from the love of Him who first loved you. (cf: LW 21, 26; 1 John 4:19)

In the Beatitudes, Jesus declares you and all believers as *blessed*. But to the sinful old Adam, this *blessedness* sounds like backwards or upside-down thinking. It sounds as if Jesus is saying that His *blessed* believers are those who are poor, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst. They are those who are persecuted, reviled and slandered. But the Beatitudes are a biblical paradox where what seems repulsive and offensive to the unbelieving world are Gospel *blessings* that the reign of God in Jesus offers to all who are His disciples from this day until the Last Day when Christ returns in glory.

So, let us unpack the meaning of our Lord's *blessings* so that we know and appreciate these truly needed *blessings* of God even though they may seem backwards from a worldly point of view. Jesus says:

³ *"Blessed are the poor in spirit..."* (Matthew 5:3)

The word *poor* here has nothing at all to do with economic poverty. While it is no *blessing* to be financially poor, and it is not also automatically a sin to have an abundance of material things. Having money, property, and land is not wrong in itself. It is a gift from God. But greed, idolatry, and trusting in your wealth above God is sinful.

Jesus says *"... the poor in spirit."* Being poor in spirit is the same as being *spiritually poor*. It is not a mental attitude but a spiritual condition of the heart. It is an objective condition that characterizes all mankind whether they know it or not. But for the Christian, being *poor in spirit* means that you recognize that you are nothing more than a beggar before God. You know that God alone provides you with all that you need to support this body and life without any merit or worthiness in you. So, Jesus is saying here that for all who acknowledge their spiritual bankruptcy before God and their need of a Savior:

"... theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

It is your present tense reality. The reign of heaven and all of its *blessings* belong to those who are poor in spirit. (cf: Gibbs, Matthew 1:1–11:1, 235) And when you begin to acknowledge that you are poor in spirit, that acknowledgment produces what Jesus presents in the next *blessing* saying:

"Blessed are those who mourn..." (Matthew 5:4)

You, dear disciple, because you are spiritually poor, you mourn when you look around the world and examine your own heart, and see wickedness, arrogance, contempt, and blasphemy of God and His Word. In your mourning, you are *blessed* right now because Jesus says:

"... [you] shall be comforted." (Matthew 5:5)

You are comforted in the words of forgiveness of sins in the Absolution. You are comforted in the preaching of the Gospel and in the body and blood of Christ in His Holy Supper. You are comforted knowing that you currently possess the reign of heaven and all of its *blessings* through Jesus. But sin and evil still exist in this world – which means your full comfort will not be revealed until the final day of comfort at Christ's return.

Jesus says:

⁵ *"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."* (Matthew 5:5)

This *blessing* is similar to the first *blessing*. Being meek is like being *poor in spirit*. It is not an attitude but spiritual condition of not being able to help or save yourself. You might be burdened

by many different things, but the power of the devil and your own sins are at the heart of your meekness. But Christ declares you and all His disciples as **blessed**, promising to all who are spiritually meek and powerless the future inheritance of a new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, where God Himself will dwell with His people in paradise forever. (cf: Revelation 21:1–4)

Jesus says:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” (Matthew 5:6)

Just as acknowledging that you are **poor in spirit** produces **mourning** over you own arrogance and contempt for God, in recognizing your spiritual **meekness** and powerlessness to save yourself, the Holy Spirit drives you to **hunger and thirst for righteousness**. That is, you long for and desire God’s righteous saving deeds accomplished in Christ Jesus. Jesus says **blessed** are you – and so you are! Jesus declares you **blessed** because God proclaims you righteous for the sake of Christ. Blessing and righteousness are yours right now. You were clothed in the righteousness of Christ in Baptism. Jesus satisfies your hunger and thirst in His Word and Sacrament, spiritually feeding you into life everlasting where you will be fully righteous and fully satisfied.

The fifth **blessing** in verse 7 brings a shift in the Beatitudes. Jesus’ words are still Good News. In the first four **blessings** Jesus’ describes you and me and all who are called to be His disciples in terms of our own sinful shortcomings. The last five **blessings** describe the Holy Spirit’s power of sanctification. They describe how Jesus’ call to discipleship begins to transform those who are called. When you were united to Christ in Baptism, the Holy Spirit empowered you to begin to live a Christlike life. Not to perfection in this life, obviously. But living as one redeemed by Christ the crucified.

Jesus says:

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

The merciful are those who truly appreciate God’s **blessings** are merciful toward others. You cannot live as Christ’s disciple without also beginning to exhibit mercy in a new way, demonstrating the transforming power of discipleship and of Jesus’ call to faith. The merciful are friendly and gentle, patiently tolerating and enduring faults or weaknesses of others. And gladly forgiving the sinful and spiritually meek.

Jesus says:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8)

You are not the pure in heart because you understand or do everything perfectly. A pure heart is the heart that has begun to repent and believe. (cf: Matthew 4:17) It is God who creates clean and pure hearts. (cf: Psalm 51:12) Hearts that are cleansed of their own peculiar ideas and filled with what God says in His Word in order to consider everything in a Christian way. On this side of heaven you have been given eyes of faith to see your heavenly Father in Christ Jesus. Jesus promises that on the Last Day you will see God face to face. (cf: 1 Corinthians 13:12)

Jesus says:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9)

As a **blessed** peacemaker, you aim to live at peace with all people, leaving retribution to God. You proclaim the peace of God in the reign of heaven and forgiveness in Christ so that others

may have the peace that Jesus brings. At Christ's return all of Jesus' peacemaking disciples will be called sons of God.

The eighth and ninth *blessings* flow from the seventh – but they do not sound much like *blessings*. Jesus says:

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:10–12)

The peace of the Good News in Jesus will not be welcome to many. St Paul writes:

“¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Unlike the first seven *Beatitudes*, the final two do not always apply to every disciple. Not all of Jesus' disciples will be persecuted and reviled in the same way. But you have been warned. As Jesus' *blessed* disciple, persecution, insults, and slander because of your faith in Him, are always a possibility. If and when persecution for the sake of Christ does happen, Jesus promises you His *blessing*. The Holy Spirit will give you the words to defend yourself, just like He gave the prophets. (cf: Luke 12:11–12) Rejoice and be glad. Your eternal reward awaits you in heaven.

Dear redeemed disciple of Christ, you are objectively *blessed* in Christ Jesus even when it does not look like it. Even when it does not feel like it. Biblical *blessedness* sounds like upside-down thinking!

“But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.” (1 Corinthians 1:27)

Worldly *blessedness* is counterfeit *blessedness*. Culture will tell you: ***“Blessed are the strong, the tough, the godless, the aggressive, the self-confident, the sexually indulgent, the fighters who hunger and thirst after the things of this world, for they shall be the winners and inheritors of the earth.”***

However, in the words of St Paul:

“... we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.” (1 Corinthians 1:22–23)

You have Jesus' objective declaration. You are *blessed* because in Christ you possess all the Gospel *blessings* that the reign of God in Jesus grants to all who are His disciples from this day until the Last Day when Christ returns in glory, specifically the *blessings* of the forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation. These *blessed* treasures, which the world despises, are objective and given you by grace through faith for the sake of Christ and are manifested by Christian good works and fruits of faith that flow from the love of Him who first loved us to death, even death upon a cross. (cf: Philippians 2:8) Blessed are you! Yours is the kingdom of heaven – both now – and unto eternity.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.

