

The Festival of All Saints
St. Matthew 5:1-12: "Blessed Are You."
November 5, 2017 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

+ + +

O God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, we humbly ask You, according to the riches of Your glory, to strengthen us with might by Your Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in our hearts by faith, that so, being rooted and grounded in love we may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen. (*The Lutheran Liturgy*, p. 161)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the fifth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when He sat down, His disciples came to Him. And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, who has opened the kingdom of heaven to all who trust in Him alone, dear fellow redeemed:

An athlete being interviewed after a victory might say with a smile that he is blessed to have the talents he has. The family sitting around the table at Thanksgiving might list all the good things they share. And you, when you look around at your neighbors, might think to yourself how blessed they are and wish you could have the blessings that they do.

When we think about "blessedness," we imagine happiness and good fortune and success. But that is not how Jesus speaks about it in today's text. He says that even those who mourn and those who are persecuted are blessed. How can this be? Well which would you rather have:

riches now or riches forever? joy now or joy forever? peace now or peace forever? Of course it doesn't have to be an either/or. God often gives His children riches, joys, and peace both now and forever. But *often* is not *always*.

I

It can be very difficult to see the blessing in a job lost, in a relationship broken, or in the death of a family member. These things feel more like a curse to us than a blessing. We might even express as much to God. "God, why did You let me get fired?" "Why didn't you fix my relationship?" "Why didn't You heal my loved one?" We are troubled by the knowledge that the Lord is all-powerful, and yet does not help us in the ways we want. Is it because He is uncaring? Is it because He is punishing us for some reason?

God does not promise that we will understand the reason for every trial we experience. He does tell us that some trials are given to train us in Christian discipline, "*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves*" (Heb. 12:6). St. Paul writes that with this in mind we can even "*rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope*" (Rom. 5:3-4). Whatever the reason for our trials, we remember the promise from God that "*for those who love God all things work together for good*" (8:28).

Everything works out for good "*for those who love God.*" But how can you and I know that we love God enough? If the standard is what Jesus lists today in the first part of His "Sermon on the Mount," we have all fallen short. Jesus says that "*the poor in spirit*" are blessed, but we are often proud and boastful. "*The meek*" are blessed, but we are often self-centered and glory-seeking. "*Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*" are blessed, but we hunger and thirst the most for earthly goods that do not last. Then there are "*the merciful,*" "*the pure in heart,*" and "*the peacemakers.*" It is not hard to think of where we have failed in those areas too. So if these behaviors that Jesus outlines are required for blessedness, how could we ever hope to be blessed?

On your own, you can achieve and gain things that are counted as blessings in the world. You can take a job that suits you. You can get married and have a family. You can make a good name for yourself. You can buy a house and nice things to go in it. But these are all earthly blessings. They are yours for a short time, and then they are left behind. The blessings Jesus refers to are spiritual blessings that benefit you not just here in time but on into eternity. They are blessings that you cannot get on your own. They must be given to you. And before they can be given to you, those blessings had to be won.

When Jesus presented His list of beatitudes, He knew full well that no one could perfectly live up to them. That doesn't mean it was a waste of time to speak them. It is important for sinners to know the righteousness that God requires. It is important to be reminded that even our best efforts do not come close to what God commands. But the Bible is clear that our salvation does not depend on our own righteousness. It depends on the righteousness of Jesus.

Did Jesus meet the standard of God? Let's see. Was He poor in spirit? Did He mourn for the lost? Was He meek? Did He hunger and thirst for righteousness? Was He merciful? Was He pure in heart? Was He a peacemaker? Was He persecuted for righteousness' sake? Each of these beatitudes describes a different part of Jesus' active obedience. They describe how He humbled

Himself and willingly endured all sorts of injustice in His quest to save sinners. Because of His perfect life, Jesus was blessed before God and given the kingdom of heaven.

But the Son of God did not become Man to win this reward for Himself. He came to win it for you. He lived a perfect life for you so that you would inherit heaven, so that you would be comforted, so that you would receive mercy, and see God, and be called His own sons. But how do you get these blessings? How do you know they are yours? Jesus says, "*Blessed... are those who hear the word of God!*" (Lk. 11:28). And He says, "*Blessed are those who... have believed*" (Jn. 20:29). You receive the blessings of God, not by your own works or good behavior. You receive the eternal blessings of God by His Word alone and through faith alone.

II

Today we are remembering the members of our churches who have entered the church triumphant within the past year: Harvey, Art, Maxine, Jim, Hilda, Jean, and Vera. Adding up their ages nets a total of well over 600 years and an average of almost 90 years each. If we totaled the blessings we received from knowing them throughout their lives, it would be a very lengthy list. But the blessings they received from God are uncountable. From the time of their baptism until their dying day, the Lord poured out upon them His grace and comfort, His righteousness, forgiveness, and life – always and only through the means of grace.

The Lord does the same for you too. By His powerful Gospel, He sustains and strengthens your faith, so that the benefits of Christ's perfect life and atoning death are continually credited to you. Through faith in Him, Jesus' righteousness is given to you as though you had produced it yourself, and His cleansing blood is applied to you as though you had paid for your own sins.

If you lived before the Reformation, your priest probably would have told you that you must make satisfaction for your own sins. He would have also reminded you to do what you could to help the souls of the deceased get out of purgatory. How might this be done? By making pilgrimages to various holy sites and relics, by purchasing indulgences from the pope, by sponsoring private masses in the name of a loved one, and so on. But how could human works ever satisfy a person's great spiritual debt?

The righteousness that counts before God could never come through your works. It must come through faith, faith in Jesus who accomplished everything for you. In Him you are declared to be a saint, or holy one, of God. You are counted as one who is innocent, sinless, pure. Everything God demands of you, He freely gives you. So when Jesus talks about the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the hungry and thirsty, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers – He is describing you, because you are in Him, and He is all those things.

What this means is that you are blessed. **Blessed Are You** even when you mourn and suffer persecution. **Blessed Are You** even when everything seems to be going wrong, because "*the kingdom of heaven*" is yours in Christ. All of your earthly blessings can be taken away from you, but the spiritual blessings of God are eternal. This is why Jesus says, "*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things – all you need in this life – will be added to you*" (Mt. 6:33).

The Lord is not uncaring about your troubles, nor should you assume He is punishing you when something bad happens to you. If you as a Christian experienced no trouble in the sinful

world, that in itself would be a cause for concern! We will have trouble here, because we are only temporary inhabitants of this world. Our true home is somewhere else. St. Paul writes, “[O]ur citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20).

When Jesus returns visibly in all His glory, He “will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself” (v. 21). Then we will look like the saints that we already are in Christ. Then we will inherit the eternal blessings that we already possess but do not yet fully enjoy. Then we will live under the Lord in His heavenly kingdom, “and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness” (Explanation to the Second Article). What a blessing that will be!

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

+ + +