

Sunday: All Saints' Day

Date: November 1, 2020

Text: Matthew 5:3-4

Title:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

This year we have buried two of our beloved members. Two people we shared the ups and downs of life with. Two people who we shared coffee with. Two people who we shared adventures with. Two people we shared God's Word and Sacraments with. Two people who loved each and every one of you as a family member. Two people who lived long full lives and who died in the arms of our Savior, Jesus Christ. As we remember these two members of our congregation, it brings a tear to the eye and sadness to our hearts. They are missed, just as all of our departed members are. Joe and Joy were blessings to the church and models of faith, hope and love.

Although we are saddened by the death of our Grace family members, we do not live in that melancholy. We know our friends are safe in the arms of the Lord and are waiting patiently for the resurrection of the dead and their entrance into the new heaven and new earth Jesus will inaugurate with his return.

The reason we can live in this hope, is found in our Gospel reading today. Matthew 5 begins what is often referred to as "The Sermon on the Mount." This is the first of five teaching discourses of Jesus in Matthew's gospel. In our text today, Matthew records Jesus' words as he opens the door to understanding the message he delivers as his 1st discourse. In addition, Jesus gives us comfort and hope in his words.

In verses 3-12, Jesus speaks 9 statements identifying a condition of blessedness. In what seems contrary to reason, Jesus declares people like the "poor in spirit", "the meek", "those who mourn", and "those who are hungry" blessed. These groups are far from blessed in the eyes of the world. They are the weakest and most marginalized in society. These are the ones that our society leaves behind and considers a lost cause. The successful and the happy in the world want nothing to do with these types of people.

But Jesus' does not look at these individuals as worthless. Jesus looks upon each of these groups as the lost sheep who he came to redeem. These are the ones he sees as he looks out on the crowds at the feeding of the 5,000 and says they are like sheep without a shepherd. He has pity on them, and he loves them.

As Jesus opens his mouth to speak, he is talking to the disciples who came to him. Jesus sat down, opened his mouth, and said,

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

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

As we hear these words, we often lose track of who they are initially addressed to. Jesus is speaking to his disciples, his catechumens, the ones he chose to carry the message of the Gospel to the world. He is saying Peter, James, and John, Philip, Judas and Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, and Thaddaeus, Simon, and James, are the poor in spirit and the ones who mourn. This causes us to furrow the brow and wonder, what does Jesus mean. These men who sat at Jesus' feet, learning from the master seem to be anything other than poor in spirit and in mourning.

Yet this must be the case because Jesus speaks with authority. As Jesus concludes the sermon on the mount, Matthew records the reactions of the people who heard Jesus speak. Matthew says,

The crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes (Matthew 7:28-29).

As Lutherans we ask the Lutheran question of this text. We hear the proclamation of Jesus and inquire, "What does this mean?" As he speaks to his chosen disciples, "What is his message to them?" And as God's Word speaks to us today, "What does Jesus say to us?"

Jesus begins by identifying a condition then specifies an outcome. Initially he speaks of the poor in spirit, which may be better understood as the spiritually poor. These are the ones who lack the faith and trust in God to provide for them. These are the ones who do not know the Messiah, or trust in the promise of the God through the prophets. These are people living in darkness. People in need of the light.

In truth, the disciples were just like everyone else. They were not unique. They were born into the world as sinful people, all of whom needed the Savior. Jesus' catechumens, his disciples, were called out of darkness by our Lord and were being given faith as they learned. As ones who were called out of darkness, given the gift of faith and salvation in Christ Jesus our Lord, they are blessed with the kingdom of heaven.

This first beatitude is one of present and on-going effect. Notice the language used. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. These spiritually poor individuals presently have the kingdom of heaven. This is the now, the present, the immediate experience of living in God's eternal kingdom as brothers of Christ. This is the now, with anticipation of the not yet manifested.

Jesus second beatitude transitions to reflect the present condition of the hearer and the blessing to come. This is the not yet of the now and not yet kingdom of heaven.

In this world we mourn many things. We mourn the death of a loved one. All of us have experienced this to differing degrees as Joe and Joy were called to the church triumphant. Sadness or sorrow cling to us as we miss the company of our friends and the support of our loved ones. This is not the only source of our mourning.

Many people mourn the loss of a friend who moves away. Others mourn the loss of a pet. I think all of us mourn the life we used to have before the Pandemic hit. As we age and our health begins to deteriorate, we mourn the loss of vitality, energy, and resilience

In light of our Gospel this morning, I believe we can connect the second beatitude with the first. The second being a sort of couplet, much like the psalms we chanted a few minutes ago. The first line identifies an idea and the second repeats the idea with a clarification and emphasis on the first.

Let Israel be glad in his maker;
Let the children of Zion rejoice in their King!

For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;
He adorns the humble with salvation

The first line expresses an idea, the second refines it.

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

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

The spiritually poor as they mourn because of the lack of hope will be comforted as they are given faith and drawn into the kingdom of heaven.

Mourning is the feeling we experience when our loss overcomes our ability to cope with our emotions. The loss of a loved one upsets our whole person and leads to feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

In our natural state, we are bereft of hope. Without the gift of faith, we are without true hope. Sure, we can try to convince ourselves that we are okay. People try to fill the hole in our hearts and in their lives with experiences, possessions, and philosophy. But all of these things are hollow. They are all fleeting. Each of these things can be taken away. Jesus tells the hearers of the Sermon on the Mount.

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

While loss of earthly treasure may result in mourning, Jesus directs us to look to trusting in the things that are not subject to destruction by earthly means. The gift of faith poured out on the poor in spirit by the gift of the Father does not rust and will not be stolen by earthly thieves.

As we mourn our broken, corrupt nature; as our poorness in spirit overwhelms us, God steps in with the soothing words of the Gospel. God gives us his Son as the means of blessing us and giving us the kingdom of heaven. God pours out his Son for us to comfort us in our mourning. A comfort that will be complete when we are brought into the new heaven and new earth at the bodily resurrection. A comfort that will be fully manifested as we are once again going to see our sainted friends and family. We will see Joe, Joy, Pauline, and all of our brother and sister saints who have died and gone before us to Paradise.

This is the result of what Christ has done for you, me, and all mankind. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we have the reconciliation necessary with God for us to be able to enter his presence. Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross,

paid the price for our sins, past, present, and future. This is the Gospel, the good news for all mankind. This is what we are called to share with all people so they too can share in the blessings Jesus shared with the disciples on that hillside, and that he shares with us through his word. These are the blessings we continue to experience as we gather together in worship, sharing God's Word and His Sacraments.

The blessings we hear Jesus speak today, are the blessings given to us in Holy Baptism, as we were declared blessed and given the kingdom of heaven. This is the cure for the mourning of our separation from God in our poorness of spirit, the comfort for our souls. This comfort continues in this kingdom as we anticipate the fullness of the not-yet kingdom.

Today as we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we, again, participate in the feast that is a foretaste of the feast to come. We gather with the whole church, the church militant on earth, and the church triumphant in paradise, celebrating the reconciling sacrifice of Christ for us. We partake of the life-giving body and blood of Jesus, that does exactly what he said it does, forgive of sins and assure us of our salvation.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ

Blessed are [you] the poor in spirit, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are [you] who mourn, for [you] shall be comforted.

Amen