

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
January 29, 2017
St. Matthew 5:1-12
Blessedness in Demonstration of the Spirit's Power
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Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

One of the readings at our new president's inauguration, were the Beatitudes. The translation the reader used read, for example, "God will bless the poor in spirit." "God will bless the meek." This seems to give the impression that such qualities are the reasons for God's blessings. Would you agree?

What Jesus is saying is quite the opposite. Our translation reflects that. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." "Blessed are the meek." Those qualities with the others are the reality of those whom God has blessed with the gift of faith in him.

Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount preached only to his disciples with comforting and reassuring words. His words make no sense to those without the Holy Spirit. Without him, they seem nonsensical like something out of Alice in Wonderland. To those who trust in Jesus Christ for salvation, and desire to have the same attitude as Christ Jesus, our Savior's words are a radiant jewel with several facets.

Blessedness does not lie within our power. It is **Blessedness in Demonstration of the Spirit's Power**. This blessedness is completely foreign to unbelievers. This blessedness leads to great reward in heaven.

The root meanings of the word, blessed, are happy, well off, having fortitude. It is an adjective tied to the descriptions of Christ's disciples. Jesus was reminding those disciples and us that such blessedness is in demonstration of the Spirit's power. We would not humbly recognize and acknowledge our sins and their consequences apart from the Spirit. We would not be humble before God or seek Christ's righteousness. Our hearts would not be pure, and we would not seek peace with one another as God has given us peace apart from the Spirit's power.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is the strong wind that blows away the fog of worldliness and vanity which often roll in over the landscape of our hearts and minds. Jesus' Beatitudes remind us that the pride, rejoicing over sin, arrogance and self-righteousness the unbelieving world embraces are not who we are. We are happy and well off to do the opposite in spite of ridicule and rejection. We see that our experience as the sons of God to be persecuted, insulted, slandered because of our obedience to Christ as members of the kingdom of God are what identifies us.

Such mistreatment connects us to the prophets of old who had to endure the same abuse for the sake of Christ and his Word. Isaiah wrote, "Who has believed our message?" [53:1] Jeremiah knew his enemies plans against him, "Let us destroy the tree and its fruit; let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more." [11:19] The writer to the Hebrews wrote of those believers before us that they were tortured, flogged, chained in prison, sawed it half, yet get the idea.

This blessedness is completely foreign to unbelievers. To us, it is what we are in demonstration of the Spirit's power in our hearts by giving us faith in Jesus. We have the fortitude of the Spirit of Christ to enable us to be the things the world looks down upon and rejects out of hand. Think of how all those blessings applied to Jesus in his attitude of sacrifice for us on the cross. He was blessed by his Father as the world rejected him. That blessedness led to his resurrection and return to heaven. The same is true for us.

Jesus ended his Beatitudes, or blessings, with a promise. It is the same promise those the writer to the Hebrews mentions held, "So that they might gain a better resurrection." This blessedness leads to great reward in heaven.

Our greatest blessing, our reward of grace, for the sake of Christ is that we will be in heaven. For now we live in that blessedness Jesus describes. We are poor in spirit, contrite over sin. We mourn over those sins. We are meek, humble before the holy God and with others. We hunger and thirst for Christ's righteousness that gives us a pure heart. We share peace through the gospel as we have peace through the gospel. We are persecuted like Jesus was persecuted for obedience to God's will.

Those qualities identify us as the children of God. They are characteristic of the citizens in the kingdom of God. We rejoice in these even as the world believes we are fooling ourselves, or have an unrealistic expectation of a better life to come. Others wrongly believe it is only earthly greatness and success that lead to reward in heaven.

Jesus has given us a general description of our blessed lives as believers. Jesus also advises us not to worry when others abuse us. We have the promise that as we remain connected to Christ through the gospel in Word and sacrament like branches to the vine we will be with Christ in the world to come.

The white rabbit lead Alice down the rabbit hole. There everything seemed strange, turned around. The Beatitudes seem just as strange to the unbelieving world. To paraphrase the Cheshire cat to Alice, "They are all mad here." No, we are no mad at all. God has given us every spiritual blessing in Christ. Seeming to others to lack everything, we realize we lack nothing.

For those apart from Christ, our lives of faith and love, of humility and compassion like our Savior, things just get "curiouser and curiouser." For us, such blessedness is Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God. Amen. <SDG.