



Scripture & Sermon

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Matthew 5:1-12

5 When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. **2** Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

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

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

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

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

9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

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

11 "Blessed are you when people 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 in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Loving and Peacefilled God,

Thank you for this time to be together. Thank you for this time with you. Bless this time we have to spend with your Word. Help us to hear what you know we need to hear, and help us to put what we learn about you and ourselves into action. In the name of the Son and Spirit, Amen.

I have been blessed to grow up as long as I did with all four of my grandparents. So days like today, All Saints Day, have mostly been a more general experience. This year is the first time that I have someone particularly close to me that has passed. My grandpa passed in early April from rapidly worsening Parkinson's paired with COVID. Losing him in the midst of the pandemic has been strange. Not only do I not know, first hand, how I grieve the loss of a grandparent, but I definitely don't know how to go about grieving the loss of a grandparent during the beginnings of a pandemic, without a funeral, and without any gathering of family. This all meant that I had a lot of time to think about it. A lot of time to think about him and how to remember him. One of the things that ended up happening soon after he passed that has stuck with me as one of

the most meaningful parts of my grieving process was a simple group text among me and my cousins. We had started it as Grandpa was declining, and came back to it once we had all found out he passed. While the loss was still fresh, we all spent time together reflecting on the things that we will remember most about Grandpa and sharing some of our favorite pictures. So much of what I learned from Grandpa was not in specific things, but the ways to be in the world. He was humble and hard-working. He served quietly and without need for thanks. He was faithful and practical. He wouldn't admit it or initiate it, but it was clear he loved being silly with Grandma and loved to laugh with her. He lived modestly and happily. It is these attitudes and ways of being in relationship with those around him that stuck with me, and the rest of his family, the most. It is for these ways that we thanked God for his life and his influence on our family.

That is a bit like what today's passage is about. We often read this portion of the Sermon on the Mount, called the Beatitudes, like a guide for good living that Jesus was sharing with us, like a rulebook. Be poor in spirit, be one who mourns, be meek, hunger and thirst for righteousness, be merciful, be pure in heart, be a peacemaker. That way of reading it isn't entirely wrong, but it is not the full picture. This passage is more about Jesus looking out on the gathered followers, those who would be the early Christian church in just a few years, and affirming them for the ways that they as a whole community are living out Christian faith together and that the hope for committing to that way of life is getting to be a part of the Kingdom of God eternal later on, which will look like some of the ways described in these verses and in what will follow what we read this morning. This is not "You will be blessed" but Jesus declaring with authority, "These authentic Christians are blessed." This is a passage of Jesus saying, "Yes, this is the way to live out the Christian community. Keep it up! Keeping it up invites God's kingdom to start here on earth which is a blessing for all and prepares us for the full Kingdom of God after our time here on earth." As my cousins and I reflected on my Grandpa's attributes that were a blessing to our family, Jesus is reflecting the ways that living out these values are blessing this community.

Here may be a good place to clarify the use of "Blessed" in this passage. In modern times, the word "blessed" gets thrown around a lot. #Blessed! We often use it today as a synonym for happy or satisfied or content. The original use of what is "Blessed" in English was closer to describing those who were in a privileged, fortunate circumstance. So, this is not a list of the ways we should be in order to be happy or a good enough person. This list is saying "Those who are meek, peacemakers, mourning, poor in spirit, hungering for righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, and persecuted for righteousness, may not look it by earthly standards, but are in privileged, fortunate circumstances because they are helping bring about God's kingdom here and will experience the fullness of God's Kingdom in the future.

Another important clarification is that this list of blesseds is not about individuals who were masters of all of them. This list of affirmations, of declarations of blessings

that are upon the people are for all of them as a community. No one person is all of these characteristics perfectly. This is an affirmation to a Christian community living out God's way of living together.

Though it is not about one person having all nine or being the perfect epitome of one of them, each of these blessings tell us about a different value of Christian life. I will flip our slide show back to the scripture passage so those who can see the screen can have that extra reminder of the text.

The first blessing is, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." This first is referring to both those who are literally poor, but the "in spirit" part points us also to a figurative poorness. Poor in arrogance, self-centeredness and material desires." Theirs will be the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom will belong to those who find their identity in true relationship with God, not in material or self-aggrandizing things.

The second blessing is, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." This mourning is not referring to the personal grief that we all experience, but instead mourning in line with lamentation, lamenting the current state of the world and how far we are from God's full vision for earth as we are right now. Lament in that they do not accept the current condition of the world as its final conditions. Many are feeling a whole lot of lament and mourning for how things are going in our country and world right now with the many things going on. The promise for how those who mourn will get to be in the Kingdom of God later is to be comforted by seeing and participating in the fullness of God's vision for God's people in the Kingdom of God.

The third is, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Meekness is kind of paired with Poor in Spirit. We are meek when we are aware of and claim our identities as children of God that are obedient to God and not the violent and selfish ways of humankind. Those who are meek now are promised full participation in the new earth later. This is not a promise for earthly goods, for material things now during this life, but the new creation we will all be a part of in the end of time.

The fourth is, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." You probably could easily guess that this is not a literal hunger or thirst for the idea of righteousness. It is a longing to actively do the Will of God or be a part of the activity of God in the world. This is not just individuals being super religious or idealistic dreamers about where God is in the world, but a true longing for God's kingdom to start among us here and helping that grow.

The fifth is, "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy." You may be catching a theme by now. This is not just mercy as an attitude or a feeling we have toward someone else, but mercy lived out in concrete action. Mercy is often hand in hand with justice. Mercy, as used here, is not a sign of weakness or just a way to get by

and survive in this world. This is a claim that those who are merciful to others receive mercy from God.

The sixth is, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." The idea of purity here is not just the basic opposite of impurity, in the vein of being pure of impure thoughts. This purity of heart is more about being undivided and purely, solely devoted to God. Having focus and worship of God alone, undiluted by split attention. Here, the opposite of a pure heart is a divided heart. That undivided faith and focus is fulfilled by seeing God in full and being in God's presence as our whole self when we join the Kingdom of God.

The seventh is, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." This one is interesting to me as it feels the most contextual of the blessings so far when I learned more about what it is saying. At the time that Jesus preached this Sermon on the Mount the Romans were the ones in power in those lands and they called themselves peacemakers and Sons of God. But what they called peacemaking was forced submission through violence applied by their self-given authority. Jesus is making a call here for peacemaking that is the opposite of the Romans. Peacemaking that stems from positive actions that help foster reconciliation. It is these kinds of peacemakers that will receive the title sons of God and will join God's family of angels in the Kingdom of God.

The last but not least (in more ways than one), "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." There is a bit to unpack here. This blessing can easily be heard by someone as Jesus saying he wants his people to be persecuted. It is not like that. It is more about saying, "Bless you, those of you who are unjustly facing persecution for the sake of staying a part of this community of faith and helping God's Kingdom of Earth as it is in heaven grow." This is a blessing for those who are persecuted or reviled because they are holding to God's values instead of society's or the world's values. The same as the first beatitude, those who are persecuted will belong to the Kingdom of God.

All of these blessings are exhortations or affirmations and encouragements to the living believers to keep on doing what they are doing. To hold on to the ways they uniquely go about living and doing. To hold on to the ways that they have been taught to live out their faith. To make their faith fully a part of their lives and themselves and the way they live as a community. These blessing statements, the beatitudes also remind us of the hope that is to come for all of us after death and the hope that those who have already passed on to be with God are already living. Jesus promises us an eternal home with him and the fullness of our Triune God that is founded upon devotion to God, mercy and comfort, reconciliation, God's values in completion and none of the world's, and full community of all those in our faith family from all time. Jesus encourages us to persevere when living out our faith even when it is tough so we can see and create bits

and pieces of that Kingdom here on earth. We are a part of that, but reading this passage this morning, on All Saints Day, we are reminded that it is that, living out faith together to share in the kingdom of God, that God's people have been doing for thousands of years. This is not work on our shoulders alone or on our generation alone. It is work that all Christians have done, do, and will do. We do this work together with those here on earth, but also with all those that support us as the cloud of witnesses. That cloud of witnesses, those saints, can act as examples for us of what it looks like to live as the blessed community. Perhaps they were not perfect, but that is the whole point, it takes a whole community together to pull together the pieces of God's Kingdom among us. It is not up to us to decide who contributed what or enough or not enough, but we can celebrate for the ways that our walk of faith and work in faith have been impacted by those in our life. That is what today is about. To celebrate those that have been a part of creating God's Kingdom on earth for us and others and celebrate that they have impacted how we live into our part of creating God's Kingdom differently because of them. We will spend some time of remembrance during communion. We will not have the time this morning to delve into each person, but during a free moment after I read the names, I encourage you to spend some time thinking about one or two people who have passed and now support you from the cloud of witnesses, that have had an impact on the way that you live out your faith and contribute to God's Kingdom on Earth. We don't often give ourselves time to think about those who are gone. It can make us sad to think about them being gone. Today's a day to allow ourselves to get a little sad so that we can also remember and celebrate our little corner of family reunion in heaven. I hope that in allowing yourself to live in that space of sadness, remembrance, and celebration that you can feel strengthened to live into our Christian community anew or for the first time knowing that those people continue to support you from the eternal Kingdom of God.

Let us pray this All Saints' Meditation together.

We give you thanks, O God, for all the saints who ever worshiped you whether in brush arbors or cathedrals, weathered wooden churches or crumbling cement meeting houses where your name was lifted and adored. We give you thanks, O God, for hands lifted in praise: manicured hands and hands stained with grease or soil, strong hands and those gnarled with age, holy hands used as wave offerings across the land. We thank you, God, for hardworking saints; whether hard-hatted or steel-booted, head ragged or aproned, blue-collared or three-piece-suited they left their mark on the earth for you, for us, for our children to come. Thank you, God, for the tremendous sacrifices made by those who have gone before us. Bless the memories of your saints, God. May we learn how to walk wisely from their examples of faith, dedication, worship, and love.

Amen