

On All Saints Sunday it's a tradition to remember our brothers and sisters in the Lord who have passed into Glory. During this time we read and meditate on the Beatitudes, the introduction to our Lord's first sermon, the Sermon on the Mount. For they are the characteristics or qualities of a people redeemed by God, a people who live in anticipation of the final Resurrection, qualities which stand in stark contrast to the ugly realities of this world in which we live. This morning we're going to examine the Beatitudes and talk about what they have to do with our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

MATTHEW 5:1-12

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.² And he opened his mouth 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 shall be comforted.⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.¹⁰ "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.

For Christians, a saint is a person who believes that Christ died for their sins and has ushered them into the Kingdom of God. If that includes you, please say "Amen!"

Welcome to the house of God fellow saints of the Kingdom! St. Paul wrote that those who are "**sanctified in Christ (are) saints by calling**" (1st Corinthians 1:2). We don't venerate or pray to saints, for we ourselves are saints by definition. We all have equal access to the throne room of God.

But we do remember those who have died, recalling how they made a difference in our lives, and remembering that it was the Lord who transformed them from mere men and women into heirs of his Kingdom. This morning we will reflect on the Beatitudes for they summarize the work of God in his saints, in those who've preceded us, and in you and me.

The nine Beatitudes describe this work of God in 3-parts. The first four Beatitudes are about our conversion, the second group of four are about our discipleship after conversion, and the last Beatitude, number nine, is a proof that we walk with God.

It's easy to forget that this was Jesus' first public speech to the people. They weren't Christians, and they had no idea what his schtick was. They were Jewish people who lived under the hand of the Roman government and longed for deliverance by the promised Messiah. That's why Jesus began with conversion.

Our Lord preached his first Beatitude, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (v.3)**. To be "**poor in spirit**" is about how we're spiritually destitute before God, that there's nothing in me that is redeemable by its own accord.

Indeed, we look around and it doesn't take long to see that the darkness of the world is deep; it's palatable; we sense it; we feel it. There's no light at the end of this tunnel, but there's only more darkness—more fear, more shame, and more pain. There are momentary pleasures in the world, but they are only that, and they will all disappear in the same flood of regret which beckons our name like a bad dream.

Jesus continued his call to conversion, preaching, "**Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.**⁵ **Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**⁶ **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (vv.4-6).**

To be "**poor in spirit**," to "**mourn**," to be "**meek**" before the Lord, and to "**hunger and thirst for righteousness**" describe one's state of mind, the condition of one's heart before he knew God as his Father in Heaven. It was our natural state.

To “**mourn**” is the cry for relief from suffering: my suffering, the suffering of my loved ones, the suffering of humanity.

To be “**meek**” is to be humble. When our spirits were crushed by our day to day burdens, we were humbled indeed.

To “**hunger and thirst for righteousness**” is about how we longed for healing of our bodies, of our hearts, and of our relationships with other people.

Of course, we wanted to take care of all this ourselves. We don’t like to ask for help. But we had that ah-ha moment when we realized we had been stumbling around like blindmen in utter darkness. There in that void, Jesus took us by the hand and showed the way to life, his life, with his love, in his light. And we were his.

Jesus said, “**I am the Light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in the darkness but will have the Light of life**” (John 8:12). In his light, Jesus showed us the difference between sin and the will of God. He revealed the work of Satan and he gave us a glimpse into the glories of heaven.

Please disregard all the sermons you’ve heard in the past that described how being “**poor in spirit**” is about being humble before God. When we talk like this, we’re trying to make a condition for conversion into a quality of the converted. But sometimes we need to be reconverted. Personal story: When my family was crushed by divorce, I felt abandoned by God. There was no one for me. I was alone. I was “**poor in spirit.**” It was there in my spiritual bankruptcy I heard Jesus’ voice, “**Come to me all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest**” (Matthew 11:28).

There in those words of my Lord I saw the light and I rediscovered the Lord’s love for me. Each one of us was at one time “**poor in spirit.**” But the Lord in his mercy lifted us up, breathed life into us, and now we are rich in him. Our own spirits are wed to his. We are one in Spirit and Truth, and we live with confidence that our destiny is heaven and glory!

In the same respect, our mourning has been turned to joy, for even in the midst of suffering, the Lord meets us. **“Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say, rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4)**

Too, we are no longer **“meek,”** but we gather **“with confidence before the throne of (God) so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).**

When Jesus introduced Holy Communion, he said, **“Take, eat, this is my body.... Take, drink... this is my blood.” (Matthew 26:26-28).** Thus we no longer **“hunger and thirst for righteousness,”** for we have literally eaten and drunk the righteousness of God, and he has taken away our sins and made us whole.

This is how we should understand the first four of the nine Beatitudes: They describe our fallen state before God, and they reveal how Jesus rescued us.

Next, Jesus preached about being his disciples. He said, **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy” (v.7).** As I’ve noted before, a disciple follows his teacher to-the-T; he becomes a carbon copy of his teacher’s behavior.

Jesus’ mercy is beautifully illustrated by his prayer on the Cross when he prayed, **“Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:24).** He could’ve raged against his enemies, but he did not. He saved them.

Friends in Christ, it is only because we have received the mercy of Jesus that we are able to do as he did, that we can love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (**Matthew 5:44**). It’s not a challenge to show mercy to people who love us. But to be merciful to those who slander us, steal from us, and even hurt us physically is another story.

I hold no ill feelings against a person who betrayed me, nor another one who slandered me. But I haven’t always felt that way. But I did after I prayed for forgiveness for my own part in the relationships, and after I prayed for the other person, that they would know the joy of Christ in their hearts. It is only after such prayers that the Lord replaces my resentment with his love and my desire for vindication with his peace.

Jesus continued his teaching about being his disciples, saying, "**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**⁹ **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.**¹⁰ **Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"** (vv.8-10).

Just like being "**merciful**," these Beatitudes are a part of our discipleship because Jesus has filled us up with his love. He has made us "**pure in heart**," he has transformed us into "**peacemakers**," he has prepared us to be "**persecuted for righteousness' sake**."

My friends, we cannot be effective disciples of Christ when the things in our hearts cloud our vision of the Lord. When we feel that the Lord is distant from us, perhaps we need to pause and reflect on what is going on in here, in our hearts, to meditate on what might be interfering with my communion with God.

As I explained in Bible study a couple weeks ago, when I feel like I'm out of step with the Lord, during my morning meditation I'll make a list of the stuff that's been bothering me, then I'll pray through it, and then I'll burn it.

God forgives us all our sins. There's nothing that can separate him from us between now and forever. But if we want to see through the darkness, if we want to see his face, we must rediscover his mercy for ourselves.

So too when we receive God's shalom into our own hearts and find our rest in him, when we really live this, then we can be "**peacemakers**." Maybe we need outside help, as in a therapist or an Al-Anon meeting. And that's okay. Remember, the only person who told us we had to figure all this out on our own was that little voice in our own heads. God invited us into this community to care for one another and to be cared for by one another.

And when it comes to being prepared for persecution, our Lord has given us his Spirit that we would be fearless in our own spirits when we are confronted by our mortality. The Lord has already demonstrated his power over the evil one and his minions with his Resurrection.

And this brings us to the ninth and final Beatitude, which is the consummation of our life in Christ in this world. Jesus preached, "**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” (vv.11-12).

What greater proof of our Christian discipleship could there be than our strength under persecution? Jesus was persecuted for righteousness' sake when he ministered to us in our darkness. His persecution led to his death on the Cross. But behold! On the third day he defeated sin, death, and the devil, and he reigns at the right hand of God. He is our Lord! He is our Redeemer! And we are his disciples! When we embrace our discipleship in him in full measure, we are prepared for anything, and our reward will be great indeed!

The Beatitudes explain who we are and then they tell us who Christ is to us, revealing his merciful hand in our lives. They help us to see what we are becoming through his grace. The Lord is transforming you and me that we might be like him, that we might serve and love one another and the people around us whom the Lord has brought into our lives.

This week let us take hold of the Beatitudes as our own testimony of how the Lord saved us from the darkness and brought us into his light.

This week let us embrace our discipleship in Christ in full measure as we walk with one another.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.