

All Saints, A, 2008

November 2, 2008

Matthew 5: 1-12

Title: Growing in God's Hands

Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer.

I want to focus on three aspect of blessing from Jesus' Beatitudes:
Blessed are you; Blessed by Jesus; blessed saints.

Blessed are you.

In Matthew's Gospel much of Jesus' teaching is contained in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5-7. If what is said first is primary, then these beatitudes are critical for understanding our Lord.

So important are these blessings it makes you wonder why we don't imprint them in our hearts. We regularly pray the Lord's prayer, how come we don't regularly speak these blessings? Change the benediction at worship's end—The Lord bless you poor in spirit All the way tothe Lord make his face shine on those persecuted for his sake. Or that we substitute for the Kyrie, Lord Have Mercy.....the beatitude.

Instead of In Peace Let us Pray to the Lord to

Sing Blessed are you merciful, for you will receive mercy

It is odd that more churches aren't named after Jesus Beatitudes. Where are the churches named Blessed? Come to Poor in Spirit Church—imagine the tag line for such a church: A community of faith for those fragile in faith. Or how about Meekness Lutheran Church—what a beautiful name....and in our day of red states/blue states, where the airways are filled with accusation and one upmanship...a church that lives and teaches gentleness, a blessed spirit of otherness pervades. Go to our ELCA website; search church names; not a single church named meekness.

Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness Church? What a name this is!
A community of people whose deepest hunger is for Jesus himself?

And for certain nary a community named Persecution Church. And yet this is the last beatitude...in fact it is the one Jesus gives the most instruction on. It's as though our Lord expects it for His church. We can understand it when folks come to church because it's comfortable and convenient---but are any of us getting in trouble because we are followers of Jesus?

I suspect in some small ways we are. Be merciful today in some settings and you will be walked on. Imagine what it's like in these tough economic times to be a manager who has the very hard job of letting someone go. And you have no choice but to do it. And you are a follower of Jesus...and you let people go in a loving and merciful way.....you agonize over it, lose sleep over it put yourself in others shoes over it.....

Blessed are you for being merciful.....Persecution Church has a seat for you.

Jesus has zigzagged his way along the Sea of Galilee. Gathering a large following. Like the Teacher Moses of Old, he goes to the Mountaintop, sits down and teaches and the first thing he says is

Blessed are you!

These are words of pure grace. Nothing we can do to deserve or achieve this blessing. It's unearned and it comes from the heart of God. Trust it. Trust it when you are mournful and suffering, when all you wear is the wet blanket of grief. It weighs you down, stifles your energy, hounds you at every turn. Blessed are you! Blessed are you! You will be comforted!

Blessed are you who have every reason to be cynical, who have had the corners of your life whittled down by events beyond your control and you come up with the best spin on it. Somehow you remain pure in heart---seeing the best, even when you know the worst.

And could these blessings flow into one another? To be poor in spirit opens you to be mournful, seizing your heart for meekness, making you restless for righteousness, bending you in mercy, forging you in pure heartedness desire for others, strengthening you for peace, empowering you when persecuted.

Blessed are you

What is not blessed by Jesus? What he did not say is also worth noting. Jesus didn't say

Blessed are those who satisfy their desires
Nor did he say Blessed are the cool, blessed are the good looking or blessed are the greedy. (Taken from The Beatitudes for Today by James Howell)

Given that those things not blessed by Jesus can hold such sway, we need to be prepared for His words to take a long time to have their way with us.

Blessed are you!

Blessed Jesus! The teacher walks the talk. Jesus lives these blessings. Trust Him. These words are autobiographical. The Beatitudes are also about him. From poor in spirit to persecuted. It matters who said these words! Jesus embodies the Beatitudes. Therefore, we can trust Him!

Jesus was a peacemaker! He loved His enemies! While enduring the gruesome agonies of crucifixion Jesus looked down on his perpetrators and prayed, "Father, forgive them." And the night before he died, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you." And on the cross Jesus proclaimed God's peace.

Jesus wept over the death of his friend Lazarus. Jesus wept over the city Jerusalem. When he saw crowds of people, his gut wrenched.

Blessed Jesus lived the Blessings. Blessed are you.
Blessed saints!

Here is our list of saints, the dead in Christ. We behold these and the multitude gathered in the communion of saints, unbounded in time and space. How are we to view them?

First and last, as being blessed. Sweep up in God's decisive movement in the world. Who among these saints sought to be merciful? Who among these saints embodied the hunger and thirst for righteousness? Who among them were persecuted for following Jesus?

Take a moment to find one name here and to give thanks for their being a living beatitude.

To believe in the communion of saints is to behold the beauty of Christ reflected in the lives of those he claims. And those he claims are his forever.

Thank you to all of you who have provided a scrapbook page for our 25th Anniversary Scrapbook. So far there are 7 books of pictures and remembrances. To thumb through them is to see faces, events that have molded and shaped us. These pages are a pictorial history of the hand of Christ upon us.

The powerful events that Christ has used to shape us. Summerfest, day camp, vacation bible school, confirmation, bible study, mission trips, and the number of baptisms pictured—marking God's imprint on us.

And we of all people are being tapped by our Lord to bind our lives with the people of the Mnene parish in Zimbabwe. That our fate is theirs. The scrapbook of the saints is incomplete without them. To behold that some 7000 miles away, these people's lives matter to us. Where there are 850 children orphaned by AIDS. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

And that soon we will again see the face of our brother in Christ Bishop Ambrose Moyo who will preach here. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. God raising up children of peace in this strife torn world.

We are blessed by Jesus. It's the first thing he wants for us. He hands us this gift, himself, and invites us to conform our lives to His. In so doing Jesus says, 'Blessed are you.' And we say, "Thank you, blessed Jesus!" And the saints acclaim "We are blessed."