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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (Series A)

January 29, 2017

Text: Matthew 5:1–12

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

Throughout this Epiphany season I have been emphasizing that the gospel readings are chosen in order to help us understand better who Jesus is and what He came to do. The Jesus born in Bethlehem is the Christ, the One who saves His people from their sins. In order to capture Jesus' identity and work, I have been calling Him the sinner-saving Lord.

The past three Sundays have laid out before us what kind of sinner-saving Lord, Jesus is. So, we've seen He saves us by becoming one of us, sharing in our human nature. As the God-man, He was anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He takes away our sins by bearing them Himself; He carries them to Calvary's cross and dies with them and for them. When He rises from the dead, our sins are forever removed from us, never to be brought back to stand against us in accusation or condemnation.

We've also learned that Jesus calls disciples to follow Him in the way of eternal life. Through His powerful word, He chooses us, calls us, gathers us, enlighten us. Finally, Jesus is the kind of sinner-saving Lord who bears not only our sins but our sicknesses, infirmities, even our own death. In their place, He promises eternal life and resurrection unto eternal glory that transcends the momentary afflictions of this evil age.

This is the Jesus – the sinner-saving Lord, Lamb of God taking away the world's sins, bearing iniquities and sicknesses, calling men, women, and children to faith and discipleship, and dying and rising again for our justification – who now becomes our Master and teacher in the Sermon on the Mount.

Today, we hear Jesus teaching us the Beatitudes. Vs. 2, "He opened his mouth and taught them..." The Beatitudes are nine statements of blessedness. The blessedness Jesus is describing means "redeemed, saved, or enriched by God." That sounds

wonderful. But the eternal blessedness that Jesus wants to give His redeemed people follows the wisdom of the cross rather than the wisdom of the world.

Jesus is the sinner-saving Lord who teaches His people the way of obedience, faith, and true piety. As we go through the nine Beatitudes, I will include statements from the psalms, which illustrate the blessed life Jesus is teaching. Thus, our daily lives of prayer and devotion to God and our neighbor can be all the richer.

Blessed are the poor in spirit (vs. 3). For they come before God spiritually impoverished, with nothing but empty hands and broken hearts. The Psalmist says, “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a spoken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (51:17). Buried under their poverty is an eternal treasure, the kingdom of heaven. The Lord God of heaven and earth will never despise your spiritual poverty for you are rich in the cross of Jesus.

Blessed are those who mourn (vs. 4). God’s blessed comfort comes to those who mourn over the sin and death that causes such devastation in their own lives as well as in God’s good creation. Their mourning isn’t blind pessimism. Rather, such mourning has the ability to see past the sin and death of this world through the death and resurrection of Jesus into the comfort of forgiveness and new life. The psalmist says, “This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life” (119:50). On Easter morning, the joyous comfort of the world is revealed for all to see. Jesus is alive! And He lives and reigns to all eternity. Jesus is your comfort.

“Blessed are the meek (vs. 5).” Meekness is abundant strength underlying gentleness and kindness. Jesus is the meek Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Before those who crucified Him, He said not a word. The power of God the Father Almighty lies hidden in the meekness of the cross. On the third day, the power and majesty of God hidden in Christ’s meekness is revealed as death, sin, and the corruption of this evil age are defeated. In their place comes peace and the promise of a new creation. The psalmist wrote, “But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace” (37:11). The whole new creation is yours in the peace and power of Christ’s meekness.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” (vs. 6). Since Adam and Eve’s original sin, all humanity has hungered and thirsted, both physically and spiritually. There are so many options out there to fill this hunger and thirst: self-made

religions, lust for power, sex, money, fame, and glory. But they always leave us unsatisfied.

The Lord Jesus declared that He hungered and thirsted to do His Father's will; in His perfect will Jesus found satisfaction. The psalmist says, "As your name, O God, so your praise reaches to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is filled with righteousness" (48:10). As we gather in Christ's name, the Father satisfies our hunger from the bounty of His right hand where Jesus sits, ruling and reigning over all creation. Through Jesus, you are satisfied with righteousness unto eternal life.

Blessed are the merciful (vs. 7). Mercy is stooping down to help another, meeting him where he is in the midst of his need. Mercy is the mark of one who is free. Free to reach out to the sick, the troubled, the wretched, the miserable, the tortured, the suffering, the imprisoned, just like Jesus. He jumped into the midst of our gloom and despair to rescue us. Tax collectors and prostitutes were his dinner companions. He touched the demonized, the diseased, the desperate. He extended His arms in mercy on a cross and embraced all humanity. In Jesus, we receive God's blessed mercy. The psalmist says, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (23:6). Jesus holds us forever in His mercy and love.

Blessed are the pure in heart (vs. 8). Pure in heart means being innocent, as Adam and Eve once were innocent before that first sin. Purity includes doing the right things for all the right reasons. Only Jesus is pure, keeping His Father's Law perfectly in spirit and in truth. Through He bears the sins of all humanity on the cross, He does so as the pure Lamb of God who dies in loving obedience to His Father's will and for us sinners. The Psalmist says, "I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord" (24:13-14). Jesus alone is pure in heart. Through Jesus, you see God the Father. In Jesus, your innocence is restored.

Blessed are the peacemakers (vs. 9). Our world longs for peace, but it can't achieve it no matter how many diplomats or armies we send into areas of conflict. Jesus is the Prince of Peace by whose wounds we have our peace. The instrument of peace is not a gun or a bomb, or even negotiations, but the crucifixion wounds of Jesus. The psalmist says, "How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain

of life; in your light do we see light” (36:7–9). The shadow of Jesus’ cross covers all mankind in peace. The Lord Jesus is your peacemaker. In Jesus, we stand at peace with God the Father and our neighbors. In Jesus, you are truly sons of God, delighting in the abundance of His Word and Sacraments unto eternal life.

Blessed are the persecuted for righteousness’ sake (vs. 10). Our Lord taught that the servant is not above His master. Our Lord and Master was persecuted; we, His disciples, can hardly expect the world’s love and admiration. The psalmist wrote, “When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war arise against me, yet I will be confident” (27:2–3). Jesus was persecuted to death. And yet, in His resurrection, the kingdom of heaven is established forever. Baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus, you are heirs of His eternal kingdom. In this you rest confident and secure. Jesus is your righteousness and your King.

The ninth and last blessing stands out for Jesus Himself changes His mode of discourse. He addresses us, not generally, but directly. “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account” (vs. 11). Don’t expect applause for being a Christian. Expect a cross. The poverty, meekness, and mercy of Jesus provokes the world to insult, violence, and slander. His peacemaking brings persecution. The Christian life is a wilderness journey to a promised land. The psalmist wrote, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (73:25–26). Great is your reward in heaven: the Lord God Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The sinner-saving Lord gives you His blessedness. For these Beatitudes describe Jesus. All that He is and does He gives to you. You are the blessed of the Lord, now and into all eternity.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.