

All Saints

Preached on All Saints

Trinity Anglican Church, WRJ

Nov. 1, 2020

Text: Matt. 5: 1-12

St. Matthew, in his introduction to what has come to be known as The Sermon on the Mount, wishes us to see the true teaching of Jesus, the summary of the teaching which He continually gave to his inner circle. The Sermon on the Mount is nothing less than the concentrated memory of many hours of heart to heart communion between the disciples and their Master.

As we look at the beatitudes, we must remember that He spoke them in Aramaic, the kind of Hebrew people spoke in his day. Aramaic and Hebrew have a very common kind of expression, which is in fact an exclamation and which means, "O the blessedness of . . .!" That expression is very common in the Old Testament. For instance, the first Psalm begins: "O the blessedness of the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly.!"

The beatitudes are not pious hopes of what shall be; they are congratulations on what is. The blessedness which belongs to the Christian is not a blessedness which is postponed to some future world of glory; it is a blessedness which exists here and now. It is not something into which the Christian will enter; it is something into which he has entered.

The word blessed which is used in each of the beatitudes is a very special word. It is the Greek word *makarios*. This word describes the blessed life of the gods, for whom the precariousness of human life is absent. It means a joy which has its secret within itself, which is serene and untouchable, and self-contained. It is a joy which is completely independent of all the chances and the changes of life. Human happiness is something which life may give and which life may also destroy. Christian blessedness, on the other hand, is completely untouchable and unassailable. "No one," said Jesus, "will take your joy from you" (John 16:22). The beatitudes speak of that joy which seeks us through our pain, that joy which sorrow and loss, and pain and grief, are powerless to touch, that joy which shines through tears, and which nothing in life or death can take away. The Christian has the serene and untouchable joy which comes from walking forever in the company and in the presence of Jesus Christ. With that said, let us look briefly at a few of these beatitudes.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." In Hebrew, the word poor was used to describe the humble and the helpless man who put his whole trust in God. Therefore, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" means blessed is the man who has realized his own utter helplessness, and who has put his whole trust in God. If a person does this, two things will happen. This

person will become completely detached from things, for he or she will know that things cannot bring happiness or security; and this person will become completely attached to God, for God alone can bring him or her the help, hope, and strength they require. The person who is poor in spirit is the person who has realized that things mean nothing, and that God means everything. The Kingdom of God is the possession of the poor in spirit, because the poor in spirit have realized their own utter helplessness without God, they cling to Him, and have learned to trust and obey.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”. The Greek word for “to mourn,” used here, is the strongest word for mourning in the Greek language. It is the word which is used for mourning for the dead, for the passionate lament for one who was loved. Blessed is the man who mourns like one mourning for the dead. This certainly seems counter-intuitive! But when we think about it, what drives us into the arms of God like true sorrow? When things are going well, it is possible to live for years on the surface of things; but when sorrow comes, a person is often driven to God, after the vanity of the world and its props is exposed.

Some people have taken this beatitude to mean: Blessed are those who are desperately sorry for the sorrow and the suffering of this world. When we were thinking of the first beatitude, we saw that it is always right to be detached from things, but it is never right to be detached from people. This world would be a much poorer place if not for those who have cared intensely about the sorrows and the sufferings of others. Women, in general, are better at this than men. Sorry guys.

Another way to take this beatitude is: “Blessed is the man who is desperately sorry for his own sin and his own unworthiness.” The very first word of the message of Jesus was, "Repent!" No one can repent unless he or she is sorry for their sins. That is what the Cross does for us. Jesus suffered and died for our sins. When we see this sin in all its horror, we cannot do anything else but experience intense sorrow for it. The way to the joy of forgiveness is through the desperate sorrow of the contrite heart.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” In our modern English idiom the word “meek” carries with it an idea of spinelessness and subservience. It paints the picture of a submissive and ineffective creature. But as we have seen before, meekness does not carry that baggage in the Bible, but rather carries the meaning of one ultimately under God’s control. For only in his service do we find our perfect freedom, and in so doing, our joy and peace.

To do this, we need true humility, the kind which banishes all pride. Without humility, we cannot learn to please God; for the first step here is admitting our ignorance, weakness, and need for grace. We reach the starting point of true Life in Christ only when we realize that we are the creature and that God is the Creator, and that without God we can do nothing. Blessed is the man who has the humility to know his own ignorance, his

own weakness, and his own need. Those who acknowledge this and do not chafe under it, Jesus says, will inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” The fact is that very few of us in the middle and upper classes know what it is to be really hungry or really thirsty. For many in the world now, and certainly in the ancient world, it was an ever present reality. Working people in the Palestine of Jesus’s day ate meat only once a week, and were never far from real hunger and actual starvation. It was still more so in the case of thirst. It was not possible for the vast majority of people to turn a tap and find clear, cold water pouring into their house. So, the hunger which this beatitude describes is no genteel hunger which could be satisfied with a mid-morning snack; the thirst of which it speaks is no thirst satisfied with a drink from the fridge. It is the hunger of the man who is starving for food, and the thirst of the man who will die unless he drinks.

Since that is so, this beatitude is in reality a question and a challenge. In effect, it demands. "How much do you want goodness? Do you want it as much as a starving man wants food, and as much as a man dying of thirst wants water?" How intense is your desire for goodness?

Many people may have a desire for righteousness that is wistful and nebulous rather than sharp and intense; but when the moment of decision comes, they are not prepared to make the effort and the sacrifice which real goodness demands. When we approach this beatitude from that side, it is the most demanding—and indeed the most frightening—of them all. But not only is it the most demanding beatitude; in its own way it is also the most comforting. For one who is blessed in this way is not necessarily someone who achieves this goodness, but one who longs for it with his whole heart. If blessedness came only to those who achieved perfect righteousness, then none would be blessed. But blessedness comes to those who, in spite of failures, still possess the passionate love of the highest. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for complete righteousness. It is not enough to be satisfied with a partial goodness. Blessed is the man who hungers and thirsts for goodness with his whole being.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” This principle runs all through the New Testament. Jesus and the apostles are insistent that to be forgiven we must be forgiving. As James says: "For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy" (2:13). Jesus finishes the story of the unforgiving debtor with the warning: "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you; if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matt. 18:35). Immediately after Jesus delivers The Lord's Prayer, He says:

“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matt. 6: 14-15)

It is the consistent teaching of the New Testament that indeed only the merciful shall receive mercy. It does not mean only to sympathize with a person in the popular sense of the term. The Hebrew word for “mercy” here means the ability to get right inside the other person's skin until we can see things with their eyes, think things with their mind, and feel things with their feelings. Clearly this is much more than an emotional wave of pity; it demands a quite deliberate effort of the mind and of the will. If you are going to be truly merciful, you must remember that there is always a reason why a person thinks and acts as they do, and if we knew that reason, it would be so much easier to understand and to forgive. Truly, as the French proverb has it, "To know all is to forgive all," but we will never know all until we make the deliberate attempt to get inside the other person's mind and heart.

In the last analysis, is not that what God did in Jesus Christ? Through Him, in the most literal sense, God got inside the skin of humanity. He came as a human; he came seeing things with our eyes, feeling things with our feelings, thinking things with our minds. God knows what life is like, because God got right inside our life. He came to us, not as the remote, detached, isolated, majestic God—but as a man. The supreme instance of mercy is the coming of God in Jesus Christ. The person who can do this has become like God.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The Greek word for pure is *katharos*. Its basic meaning can be captured by the words unmixed, unadulterated, unalloyed. That is why this beatitude is so demanding a beatitude. It could be translated: Blessed is the man whose motives are always entirely unmixed, for that man shall see God.

It is very seldom indeed that we do even our finest actions from absolutely unmixed motives. If we give generously and liberally to some good cause, one hidden motive may self-satisfaction, or desire for the praise and thanks and credit which we will receive. If we do something which demands some sacrifice from us, it may well be that we are not altogether free from the hope that men will see something heroic in us. Ministers can certainly fall prey to this. John Bunyan was once told by someone that he had preached well that day. He answered sadly, "The devil already told me that as I was coming down the pulpit steps."

This beatitude demands from Christians the most exacting self-examination. Is our service given from selfless motives or from motives of self-display? Is the work we do in Church done for Christ or for our own prestige? Is our church-going an attempt to meet God or to be seen as pious? To examine one's own motives is a daunting and a shaming thing, for there are few things in this world that even the best of us do with completely unmixed motives.

Jesus went on to say that only the pure in heart will see God. It is one of the simple facts of life that we see only what we are able to see; and that is true not only in the physical world, but in the spiritual as well. The continuing task of all Christians is, with God's grace, to expose and remove all of the self-serving notions and distortions through which we see others and the world. God wants us to see things as He does, and so share His Heart. This is what a true saint strives to do.

So as we celebrate All Saints Day, let us remember those who have gone before and left us their example. For we are all called to be saints. A saint is someone who has given his or her life to God, who says to God and the world that God is number one in his or her life. Today we remember those who have fought the battle and won the prize. May we be numbered among them/

In the Name...