

THE SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 19, 22 & 23, 2007

St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI

CHRISTIANS ARE BLESSED – MATTHEW 5:1-12

There are certain sermons that we hear that often make a lasting impression on us. That particular sermon may have been just what we needed to hear at that point in our lives. One of the best known and maybe best loved sermons and unfortunately most misunderstood sermon is Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Many people will quote that sermon. For example, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" or "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God." Many seem to think that Jesus in this sermon was teaching people how they should live so that they might be right with God. That is not the purpose of this sermon. In fact, to understand the purpose and intent of this sermon, it is good to know to whom this sermon was delivered. Listen to what Matthew tells us, "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountain side and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them." (Vv. 1-2) this sermon was delivered to believers. It was spoken to people who believed that Jesus was their promised Savior. It was spoken to people who knew their sinful condition and trusted the Lord their God for pardon and acceptance. Jesus was not preaching to the crowds as he often did, but he was speaking personally to his followers. Now did the crowds also hear this? Yes, it appears so for we are told that there was a large crowd that had gathered. Jesus message to his disciples sitting there on that hillside and to us his 21st century disciples is **CHRISTIAN YOU ARE BLESSED.**

What does it mean to be blessed? We often throw that term around, don't we? When a couple has a healthy child, we say, "They were blessed with the gift of a child." When a couple celebrates a wedding anniversary, we speak about their being blessed by God with 40 or 50 years of marriage. When someone has lost their job and then finds a new one, we say that the Lord has blessed that person. The word blessing has the connotation of being fortunate or happy. We look at the abundant wealth that the Lord has showered upon the United States of America and we say the Lord has blessed our nation. There are blessings beside those that are physical, food, clothing, shelter and wealth. When Jesus says to us that we are blessed, he is talking about the fact that **I) We Have a Different World View.**

CHRISTIANS HAVE A DIFFERENT WORLD VIEW

Jesus lists eight different blessings that we have as his followers. Because the Holy Spirit has worked on you and me through the power of God's Word, we just have a different perspective and take on life and the things that happen in this world. We happen to know and truly believe that people are not basically good. We know ourselves. We know that we are inherently selfish. We know that selfishness shows itself in how we think what

we say and do. Through His powerful Word God brings us to the realization that we are poor in spirit. He causes us to mourn and be meek.

Most of us do not like to think that we are poor. However, when it comes to what God demands in us and of us we are spiritually bankrupt. There is no way that any of us can do what God demands. Plus our basic nature is at war with God and hates God and his commands.

This realization leads us to mourn and sorrow. We sorrow and mourn not because we got caught, but because we have offended our holy God. We are sorrowful because we have hurt our friends, families and co-workers. We know our sins and as the psalmist writes, “they are always before us.”

The Lord then brings us to meekness. We don’t go around demanding things my way or no way. We strive to be gentle, patient and considerate of the needs and desires of others.

As the Holy Spirit works those attitudes in our hearts he leads us to thirst and hunger for righteousness. As Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.” (V 6a) That’s why you and I are here today. We are hungering and thirsting for righteousness. We need to hear and know that we are accepted; that we are loved; that we have no reason to be afraid; that we are forgiven and won’t have to pay eternally for our sins and rebellion against God and others.; that we really have an eternal home with our Savior waiting for us; that we don’t have to be afraid as we live here for the Lord will take care of all of our needs.

As God assures us that he does love, he does forgive, he does provide and protect us; it leads us to change and live radically different lives. As Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful”. (v. 7a) We forgive. We don’t try to get even and make someone pay for the wrongs that they have done to us. We don’t seek vengeance on one who has done us wrong. We let go. We move forward. We put it behind us and don’t dwell on it in our mind and become hateful and spiteful.

We also strive to be pure in heart. What does that mean? We mean what we say. We don’t have ulterior motives. We don’t tell people what we think they want to hear even if it is not the truth. We don’t lie about something in order to make ourselves look good. We are honest and truthful.

Christians also strive to be peacemakers. We don’t want to start fights with others or spread rumors and lies that lead to disharmony and conflict. We work with all our heart to maintain peace and tranquility with our families, our friends and neighbors and within the Christian Church.

As we do all this, however, we also realize that we may be persecuted. People may not necessarily give us a medal for being faithful and true to the Word of God and attempting to put into practice what Jesus teaches us. As our Savior himself said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you

because of me.” (v. 11) Even if we strive to do what is right and faithful to the Lord, we might expect that people will persecute and hate us for what we do. This coming Monday we are going to have a special open forum on what it means to be a member of St. Mark’s Evangelical Lutheran Church. For several years now members of our congregation have been visiting, calling and inviting people who claim to be members of this church to attend worship. We rejoice that many have returned to worship. However, there are others who still reject the invitations. Can we allow these people to believe that they are right with the Lord when they live in open sin of rebellion against his Word and refusing to assemble with fellow Christians for encouragement and growth in God’s Word? Can we expect that some may hate us because of our desire that they hunger and thirst for righteousness? Probably. But love compels us. When you see someone along side the road, hit and bleeding, do you just drive on and think, “Oh someone will stop and take care of that person.” I hope not. You get on your cell phone, you call 911. You stop and see what assistance you can offer. We do this because we love one another because the Lord Jesus first loved us. It’s the same when you see a fellow Christian caught in some sin. But we also know that we may be persecuted for that. That’s what Jesus tells us.

As followers and disciples of Jesus Christ we certainly do have a different world view from the majority of people today. But we have been blessed. We are fortunate that God through the power of his Word has changed our hearts and blessed us

WE TRUST THE PROMISES OF GOD

Not only has our world view been changed but **II) We Trust the Promises of God.** How has that happened? Most of us by nature are suspicious and we often think the worst of someone rather than the best. We have a tendency not to believe what people tell us or think that they must have some underhanded motive for saying or doing what they did. It can be difficult to believe anyone when you are continually lied to. When people say one thing and do just the opposite. This faith we have is a miracle from God. Faith is a gift that God has given us through the power of his almighty Word. It is this same Word that made this world and everything in it out of nothing. This Word has given you and me trust in the promises and Word of our God.

Remember our Lord and Savior is not like other people. He is our Friend and Savior. He is our holy God. Even though we are spiritually bankrupt Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is ours. You and I hold our citizenship papers for heaven. One day we are going to live in that glorious land. When we mourn, we are comforted. Burdened with guilt and shame the Lord Jesus comforts us. He takes our burden away. He carries it for us. He says to us, “Cheer up! Your sins are forgiven.” (Matthew 9:2) Every week when we come here to worship and we hear those life giving and life changing words, “God, our heavenly Father, has been merciful to us and has given his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son (+) and of the Holy Spirit.” And we will inherit the earth. At the last day when Jesus returns and destroys

this present earth with fire, the Bible tells us that in keeping with his promise we look forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.” (2 Peter 3:13)

When we hunger and thirst for righteousness, we are filled. God fills us daily as we read His Word, the Bible. God fills us richly when we come here to worship and hear his Word, read, sung and proclaimed. Jesus feeds us with his body and blood at every service in this church when we celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion. We certainly are able to be filled with all that we need from God’s true and powerful word.

As we are merciful and forgiving to others, God certainly is merciful to us. He continues to forgive us for the same sins that we seem to commit over and over again. He forgives us for the sins we don’t even recognize as sin. He keeps covering our sins up with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Jesus then concludes with these comforting assurances that we will see God; we are the sons of God and the kingdom of heaven is ours. One day we who are pure in heart will see God face to face with our own eyes. Through faith in Jesus we are the sons of God and the kingdom of heaven is ours. We already possess it. We don’t have to die to have the kingdom of heaven. However, we don’t see the kingdom of heaven in all its glory until we physically die and our eyes are opened so that we are able to see our Savior Jesus face to face.

Christians, we are blessed. We do have a different world view. We see the world and the things in this world through different eyes than most people. We also have been blessed with a child like trust and confidence that takes Jesus at his Word and believes what he says. “Blessed are the saints of God, for we are bought with Christ’s own blood. We are justified by grace. We enjoy the Savior’s peace. All our sins are washed away. We shall stand in God’s great day.” (Christian Worship Hymn #394 – selected lines)

Amen.