

November 5, 2017
All Saints Day

“Understanding ‘Blessed’ ”

Matthew 5:1-12

As language changes over time it seems to me that we have a real tendency to water down the meaning of words. I can remember back in 1989 when I walked to the edge of the Grand Canyon and the view was so overwhelming I probably couldn't even get the word out of my throat; “awesome”. Now Mom says “We're having macaroni and cheese tonight!” and the kids are like “Awesome!” Nobody is going to be sitting at the dinner table with their mouth open staring at their steaming plate in awe. It's good; now awesome.

How about the word “offensive”? There was a time when to be offensive you actually had to do something that committed a real offense against somebody, or at least something that the vast majority of society would call way out of bounds. Now you get a single hyper-sensitive snowflake on Twitter claiming some often-used word or phrase, building name or ice cream flavor is “offensive” and the whole world comes crashing down over something that never really caused an offense against anyone. If the mundane is offensive, “Offensive” has kind of been drained of its meaning.

I think we've done kind of the same thing with the word “blessed”. We use the word a lot. Someone sneezes and you say “God bless you” without a thought. We use it in regards to some pretty big things in life when we say we've been blessed with a wonderful family, or with a successful surgery and recovery or an upward career move. And we use it for little things, calling ourselves blessed when we catch all the traffic lights green, when we can still fit into our blue jeans or when the McRib Sandwich comes back to McDonalds. And of course, y'all know those little situations where you say, “Bless his heart.”

Mind you, I'm not saying there is anything wrong with any of this. Blessings come in lots of shapes and sizes. But I don't want our common use of the word “blessed” to water down the force with which Christ uses it here in the Beatitudes.

To understand “blessed” correctly here, I think you have to jump forward to chapter 16, when Peter faithfully and correctly answers Jesus, acknowledging Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and Jesus responds, *“Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.”*

Blessed here is in the context of God Almighty doing something, taking action to reveal the truth that saves, that brings faith and salvation to a broken and stumbling human being. To be blessed in this sense is not to receive something of the world that makes you happy and comfortable for a bit. To be blessed in this manner is to receive the reign of heaven over you here on earth and into eternity in God's presence. To be blessed this way is to be made a holy saint of God!

This is what Jesus is talking about in the Beatitudes. He starts off with *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”* When we hear these words in faith, we acknowledge that we are poor in the spiritual things. On our own we are spiritually bankrupt before God. Yet, because of God's gift of faith we know God's steadfast love, and we beg for His intercession. In Christ's death and resurrection, in baptism, in the Lord's Supper we know that intercession has happened, and the full forgiveness of sin and life everlasting is ours! That is blessed!

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” We mourn. We mourn over our spiritual bankruptcy. We mourn over our constant failures to live as God directs us. We mourn over the pain and death that comes as a result of our sin. But in knowing Christ, we know He has taken all that upon Himself and defeated it by His cross and resurrection, and thus we do and shall know comfort in our own blessed resurrection to His presence forever!

Blessed are the meek who have no boasting in and of themselves but instead boast in the God who saves them. Rendered meek by the knowledge God humbled Himself unto death to save us, we believe and thus do inherit the new heaven and earth of eternity. That is blessed!

Hungering and thirsting for the righteousness we can't accomplish on our own but is given as a free gift in Christ, we trust that we stand this day holy in our baptism into Christ. Blessed, we are satisfied leaving the rail of the Supper, knowing the resurrected Christ's very body and blood has had its righteous way with us and we stand forgiven our sins—declared righteous!

Blessed are the merciful, those who forgive all sins because they know all their sins are forgiven. They know they are truly blessed, for God's mercy is eternity in the kingdom!

Blessed are the pure in heart—not those who have purified their own hearts, but those who know that in Christ God has come through on His promise through the prophet, *“I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you.”* God has done this! This is Blessed!

Knowing this God of mercy and love, we sons and daughters of God seek to make peace in our own lives and others—not an earthly peace, but the peace we've received coming from the cross of Christ. All of this will bring backlash from people of a fallen and sinful world that seek not peace with God but wage war against Him, struggling to be God unto themselves. But standing with God in this world is blessed, for we will stand in Christ on the day of judgment.

And I guess that's the big line of division when it comes to defining and dividing this word “blessed”. We are blessed with many things in this life ranging from this body and life itself, to the wonderful people surrounding us in this life to the mundane blessings of a good night's sleep and a delicious breakfast that follows. This type of blessed may make you content, comfortable and happy. But that blessed doesn't last, because that blessed is broken by sin.

The “blessed” Jesus is speaking outlasts all of those other things. The “blessed” Jesus speaks of endures even the loss of those things. The “blessed” Jesus speaks of will not make you happy and content according to the world's counting of such things. The “blessed” Jesus speaks of may turn the world against you; cause the world to reject you and even take all its blessing away from you. The “blessed” Jesus speaks may leave you meek and poor, hungry, thirsty and in mourning.

But the “blessed” Jesus speaks of is to dwell in the kingdom, in the presence of God forever. The “blessed” Jesus speaks, the “blessed” Jesus Christ accomplishes in you and on you is sainthood—to be forgiven and made pure in the blood of the Lamb. The “blessed” you receive this very day in Word and Sacrament is standing “blessed” in the judgment, when all other blessings are passing away.

Seek this “blessed” in Christ Jesus. All the other blessings of the world? As Jesus says in the sermon that these beatitudes are introducing, *“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”*

Be the “blessed” who knows your need and thus knows your Savior and the higher gifts that He gives. Seek these, and you are the “blessed” who receives your place in His kingdom.

Amen.