

Blessed...the God Way

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

Year A: Epiphany 4

Matthew 5:1-12 <sup>1</sup>When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup>Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

<sup>3</sup>"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>4</sup>"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

<sup>5</sup>"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup>"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

<sup>7</sup>"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

<sup>8</sup>"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

<sup>9</sup>"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

<sup>10</sup>"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup>"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. <sup>12</sup>Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

*We can easily recognize from this week's news, all the people God certainly blesses or need God's blessing. What does the word, "blessed" mean, anyway? This text is not a recipe for happiness. The Good News is that God continues to show up with those whom the world doesn't favor and demonstrates God's unconditional regard, unconditional love and the promise of internal and eternal blessings. We, like those whom Jesus names are broken too. We are blessed, God's way.*

Beloved of God, hear this. We are blessed...the God way. Amen.

If we've even glanced at the news this week, we've seen people and communities that surely, we pray, "God has got to be there with those people." Last Saturday, Monterey Park. Monday, Half Moon Bay. Then Oakland. Tyre Nichols and Memphis. Friday night, Los Angeles. Every day..Ukraine. The pain is unimaginable for those of us who haven't experienced such things. For those who have experienced it, there is no more imagining.

For Lutheran Christians, we believe that wherever there is pain, or darkness, or confusion or terror, or brokenness...there God is. God enters into the world's sin, pain, grief and injustice. For Jesus says, 'Blessed are they.'

Listen to a couple of these Beatitude phrases from another translation: You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. You're blessed when you've lost what is most dear to you. You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. (The Message. Eugene Peterson. NavPress. Colorado Springs. 1995. Pg 20.)

Ok – just wait a minute Jesus. Stop right there. This doesn't make any sense!

No, it doesn't make any sense. Just how is it that people in these conditions are blessed? The word for blessed has multiple meanings in Greek, which makes it confusing for us. In the original language, it can mean being in right relationship with God. It can also be defined as: happy, satisfied, joyful, privileged, or fortunate.

Do you sense the slippery slope this blessing business is? Today, being or having privilege (one definition), doesn't automatically equate to being happy (another definition). There are plenty of folks who are privileged and are certainly not happy.

Now layer on the belief in Jesus' day that a righteous life led to material blessings and living a life of sin led to poverty and suffering. If you were right with God, you were 'blessed.' So what's up, Jesus, with God blessing the meek and the depressed and the ones getting spat upon and cursed at? Don't you normally bless those who have "it all together?"

This text is not a recipe for happiness. This text is not a morality text that we ought to try meekness on for size, if pride is our default sin of choice. Jesus is not saying we ought to make people lie about us or discredit us.

What is He saying? What does being blessed mean to you?

Being loved? Is that a blessing from God?

Having dear family and friends.

Having enough money to never have to worry?

Not having enough money and still never having to worry?

Having our health – even if we're not 100%. Blessed?

Having a thermostat to turn up the heat even if the bill has doubled in the last month. None of us have had to build a fire for warmth, like many of God's children. Blessed.

Sounds like being blessed is a gift. Being blessed is having those people and experiences in our lives that we don't earn, don't deserve and are simply, priceless.

Jesus chooses these categories of people because in moments of deepest brokenness, we stop trying to find happiness the way the world offers it and look to God.

This is The Blessing. God will show up regardless...whether we're sick or not sick, righteous or not righteous, always pursuing justice for others or always fighting for justice we don't have. As Rev. David Lose says, "God regularly and relentlessly shows up just where we least expect God to be, in order to give us freely what we can neither earn nor achieve...blessedness! In God, "we have God's unconditional regard, the assurance to accompany us" and the power to help us rise above. (<https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/on-beatitudes-and-blessing>)

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of our life in Christ Jesus...The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

As Lutheran Christians we believe that wherever there is pain, or darkness, or confusion or terror, or brokenness...there God is. God enters into the world's sin, pain, grief and injustice. God is there, sitting on the sidewalk with those who are in shock. God is there helping the emergency personnel work the phones and get resources. God is there with those inspired to speak out, write letters, pray, and say things like, "this is not right, it has to stop!"

Thanks be to God, that the downside up vision Jesus paints is foolishness to the world and our saving grace. In some gift shops there is a 'value' table of items whose paint has worn off or whose corner is chipped. In grocery stores, there are flowers 'marked down' because they have lost their luster. These items are relegated to the back as if chipped and lack-luster items have less value.

Do we hear the joke? In our brokenness, none of us have less value to God. We're never relegated to the back of anything in God's eyes. Hear it again, sisters and brothers! God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world...The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who understand being blessed the God way, it is absolutely our salvation. Blessed are we, thanks be to God! Amen