

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ!

The Beatitudes are so familiar that it can be difficult to hear them as those listening to Jesus that day on the mountain would have heard them. But strangely enough, in the cacophony of our modern lives we occasionally hear the familiar old verses in new and unsettling ways. I admit I love the Beatitudes of Matthew, studying them, teaching them, preaching them.

Jesus says “blessed” or “happy” or even “fortunate” depending on the translation you use, from the Greek word *μακαριος*. But for many Americans, “rich” and “happy” and “blessed” have all become synonymous, and most of us including me, occasionally think if we only had more wealth we’d be happier. Would we indeed be happier? Not so much, although we might be healthier and indirectly happier. But here we have Jesus redefining what it means to be rich.

Jesus has good news for us because in every way that matters we are already rich, and Jesus will make us eternally more so by grace through faith, fed by his Word and Sacraments. The bad news, if you call it bad news, is that what Jesus bestows by grace through faith comes only through poverty of spirit, rich in sadness, rich in persecutions, rich in suffering, hungry for righteousness, forgiving our enemies, pure in heart not from our innate goodness (we have none of our own) but focused on Jesus, reviled, persecuted because of our adherence to and our lives as disciples of Jesus and these outlandish notions.

I commented last Sunday, marveling at Peter, Andrew, James, and John dropping their nets, leaving boats and family, following Jesus into new lives not even knowing where they were going. And why on earth would they do that? All Jesus promises them is trouble, even as we see today in the Beatitudes. Why would anyone want that, the disciples, you, me? But we can look back at their story, and anticipate our stories. The disciples follow Jesus for three years walking at his side or behind him. They have nothing but what is on their feet and backs, rich in persecution, and many of them as we know, die an unpleasant death.

Yet they follow, strangely happy, uncomprehending and clueless as to Jesus’ message and meaning, one or two of them often with foot in mouth, yet they continue to follow, aware that the good isn’t coming anytime soon, but content to be with Jesus. Their joy is marred only by finally understanding that Jesus will leave them for a while. They simply want to be with their Lord and Master.

And today we find that wealth, health and happiness, blessedness, are redefined in twelve terse verses. If you’re poor in spirit meaning you have no spiritual wealth of your own, well the Kingdom of Heaven comes only to beggars who rely on Jesus. Are you mourning, grieving over the losses of life and your sins then you will be comforted because Jesus has shed tears for all of us. Hungry and thirsty for righteousness you can sink your teeth into, then you will be fed with the Holy Communion because Christ’s body and blood delivers it. And if you are a charity

case yourself (and all of us sitting here this morning are), then be filled by Christ's mercy, it will spill out of your life unto the lives of others.

If you want only to be with Jesus, your heart is pure and belongs solely to him, then you will see God. In seeing him, you become more like him and his peace will make peace all around you in the midst of turmoil. Then when you're persecuted for living like this, when you're reviled and hated carrying your cross, then rejoice and be glad, for in the same manner they treated Jesus.

Nothing but Jesus, this is what it is to be rich. To lose all for Christ's sake is to be blessed. To be reviled as Jesus was reviled, to die to Jesus is a treasure beyond compare. For the Cross of Jesus comes to you free, with it, endless joyful and eternal life.

Faith in Jesus comes to you now by Word and Sacrament, water, bread, and wine. And blessed are you when this is your peace, surpassing understanding, heart and mind in Christ Jesus.

Amen.