

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Jesus opens His mouth and speaks to us today from the mountain. His voice rings in the air “Blessed are...” and the words that follow in our gospel reading are some of the most famous words of our Lord and Savior. This begins a famous and perplexing section of Matthew’s gospel called the Sermon on the Mount. Here Jesus continues to layout for us what this kingdom that he is here to usher in is all about. These past few weeks in this epiphany season, we have been getting glimpses at what this reign of Jesus will all be about. We have slowly been uncovering who God is and what He is here to do throughout the pages of the Gospel of Matthew.

In the first chapter of Matthew Jesus is described as the son of David, David the king. In the second chapter the magi come and they question Herod the King about where this new king of the Jews had been born. We see Jesus as this promised coming king. He see it further in chapter three when the forerunner, John the Baptist proclaims, repent for the kingdom of God draws near. Again we see it in the temptation of Jesus by the devil as he takes Jesus out into the wilderness and shows to him the supposed glory of all the kingdoms of the world, they would worship Jesus if he would bow down to the devil. Jesus rejects the devil’s temptation of the kingdoms of the world for his own kingdom. Finally in chapter 4 Jesus takes begins his ministry proclaiming the message first heard by the Baptist: Repent for the kingdom of God draws near. Last week Jesus began to draw people into this kingdom, calling his first disciples and making them fishers of men bringing the first citizens of the kingdom of God.

Today, these words of Jesus come to us from the top of a mountain as great crowds from all over gather to hear the words and see the miracles of Jesus. As Jesus ascends the mountain, he takes with him his new disciples as he goes higher up on the mountain face. He begins to teach by speaking for us today the beatitudes, where blessing is proclaimed. In our passage for today we continue to see the kingdom of God be This king Jesus who is here to draw disciples

to himself begins to explain what life as a citizen of this kingdom will be like. The rules of how life will be within this kingdom. Jesus begins to invite us to hear his words about this kingdom.

“Blessed are”, our Lord speaks. Jesus chooses to reveal more to us about His kingdom through the blessings that come with it. Blessed is one of those church words we throw around a lot and assume everyone understands what we mean. So what does it mean for someone to be blessed? Blessing and being blessed is used rather often in our everyday conversations. A trip to hobby lobby shows us hundreds of signs, papers and other things with blessed written on it. A look on social media sees the word used in long posts about life or the material things of this world. We even answer blessed when someone asks how we are doing. Our everyday usage of the word gives us a different understanding of what it means to be blessed by the kingdom.

In our common usage, the word blessed is used in three main areas. We are blessed with wealth, we are blessed with health and we are blessed in a spiritual sense. The most famous example of being blessed in terms of our wealth are the classic American rags to riches stories. We think of young entrepreneurs in their garage working on the next big idea that will change the world. Through their hard work and determination a blessing is reaped. In this sense of the word, being blessed is all about hard work and sacrifice. These turn into a blessing of a job, stable income and maybe even vast riches and material goods. When we think of blessing in this regard, it is a hopeful conclusion to years of hard work and dedication. It is portrayed as an inevitable conclusion to one's hard work, that with a little bit of luck it could happen you.

Our health is often portrayed through the word blessing. When everything seems to be going better than it should or better than it has been. We use the word blessed when our knees feel better than they have. We are blessed when we missed that flu that went around. We are blessed when doctors or nurses get the right medication combination to help us with whatever chronic condition we face. Health blessings seem far more random and rely on being patient more than anything else. Blessed with health and the joy that it brings.

Our culture talks about spiritual blessings as though they are attached to either of these. When there is a positive outcome, or a good thing that happens we can see a blessing from God. God seems to be on our side when we are doing well with money, when health issues go right. For many success and happiness are all spiritual blessings can be. God working in some extraordinary ways on our behalf to make us happy.

Blessings in our cultures sense are all united to positive and helpful things and the joy that we get from them. There is an element of truth to some of this. Our wealth and the health that we experience on earth are certainly gifts from God. God provides for us all things we need for life, our daily bread and God certainly works healing through doctors and nurses to bring about health. We can take much joy in these gifts, yet Jesus words seem to take us to a different extreme. We are so often focused on the happiness and joy that comes with wealth, health and other aspects of our lives, of the blessings we see that bring us joy. Yet when we hear Jesus speak from the mountain, it sounds nothing like what we just described.

In fact, as we read through the things that Jesus calls blessed, we would look at these things and even go as far as saying this person is cursed. These things seem to be as far away from blessed as possible. Jesus names these things as blessed.

Those who are poor in Spirit, Jesus is speaking about those who have nothing to offer God, devoid of all good works and doing evil. Trapped in their condition.

Those who mourn – Jesus speaks to those who have experienced the death of those around them. Who mourn the loss of something in creation.

Meek – Not a common word in our language, but speaks to someone who is long-suffering, or gentle. Someone who is putting up with what is going on quietly. Someone who is objectively in need.

Hunger and thirst for righteousness – Someone who has no righteousness on their own – yet seeks it out with all of his or her heart. Someone who is lacking righteousness.

Merciful – Jesus speaks of ones who have been hurt, who have been sinned against.

Pure in heart – In relation to the world around them Ones who are too naïve or too innocent to get far in this cut throat world.

Peacemakers – Ones who live in the chaos of this world. Of warfare and

Those who are persecuted – People who have all kinds of evil cast their way because they follow Christ.

These are the ones that Jesus calls blessed. It is a far cry from the happiness that is equated with our use of the word blessed. In fact if you were to run into anyone on this list you would feel sorry for them, and want to help them in some way shape or form. Jesus has spoken a list of people who are in some sort of need. A list of people who are lacking something in this existence and are in desperate need of assistance. Yet in the kingdom of God there is a great reversal that takes place. A reversal that shows In the kingdom of God – what is broken will be fixed, what is lacking, will be filled, what is destroyed will be rebuilt and lifted up. The citizens of the kingdom of God in the midst of the desperate situations they find themselves in, take joy. Not because of the present circumstance that they find themselves in. They have present joy looking to the future of God's fulfillment in his kingdom.

Truly Blessed are the poor in Spirit because they belong to the kingdom of God. Despite not having anything to offer God, God has brought them into the kingdom.

Truly Blessed are those who mourn, because it does not stay that way, for they shall be comforted. The loss that they experience will not last forever, in the kingdom it will brought to an end, comfort from the very hand of their lord.

Truly blessed are the meek, for in the kingdom of God all that they are lacking will be theirs.

Truly blessed who hunger and thirst for righteousness for in the kingdom they will be given more righteousness than they could ever want.

Truly blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God, be in His divine presence.

Truly blessed are the peacemakers for in the kingdom of God, there will be no conflict, nor more war or hatred. True peace.

Truly blessed are those persecuted for their reward is great, the kingdom of heaven.

In the kingdom of God there is a great reversal that takes place. A reversal that shows us that what is broken will be fixed, what is lacking, will be filled, what is destroyed will be rebuilt and lifted up. Ultimately this takes place in the king of the kingdom of God. Christ himself takes upon himself all sin, all evil and all the brokenness of this world. He takes it all upon himself to calvary and there it dies. He rises again and gives to us the new life he won. Taking our sin and giving to us life eternal. This is the grounding for our present joy. This great reversal gives us the ultimate hope for the future. That no matter what suffering or challenges we face in the present in the kingdom of God all things will be made new. Shows us that what is broken will be fixed, what is lacking, will be filled, what is destroyed will be rebuilt and lifted up.

So as we look around the world, around our congregation and even within ourselves we see the suffering which Jesus points to. In the world we see division and hatred. Racism, forgetting of neighbor and even war. In the kingdom of God all of this is coming to an end. Our king reigns and triumphs over our suffering for his glory. In our congregation we see need. We look around and personally know the stories of many in our church. We see mourning as difficult death and loss in this fallen world hurt us deeply. In our selves we know our sufferings deeply, even if we do not openly talk about it. Jesus is accurate when he paints a picture of the things His people

will face. From poor in spirit, mourning, need and disappointment, God's gracious kingdom shines forth.

In all of it we can take joy. Not because we like our suffering or that it makes us more virtuous by having suffering. We take joy because we know what our king is going to do with it. He shows us that what is broken will be fixed, what is lacking, will be filled, what is destroyed will be rebuilt and lifted up. In Jesus name, amen.