

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
February 2, 2014
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Matthew 5:1-12

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NIV)

I have a prayer for each one of you this morning. I pray that you are poor. Yes, you heard that right. I also pray that you are so sad you cry. No, I'm not kidding. I pray that instead of grabbing headlines for yourself and always getting your way that you are meek and perhaps even pushed around at times for the sake of peace. I pray all of you hunger and thirst. This is truly my prayer. I pray everyone one of you is insulted, made fun of, wronged, and mistreated. Aren't you glad you came this morning? I'm not going to be getting any offers to be a T.V. evangelist with this message. That's fine because the truth is "***God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things--and the things that are not--to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.***"(1 Corinthians 2)

So I will not change my prayer for every person here at church today, including for me. Instead, I pray we listen to Jesus who turns things upside down for us. Jesus changes us. He turns around, not just our priorities, not just our outlook, but also us. Today, may God open up our eyes to recognize and profess: **So this is what blessed disciples look like!**

This Sermon on the Mount is probably Jesus' most famous sermon. Also it is the most misunderstood. In fact, if all we had was this sermon we would lack an understanding of how we are saved. That's because this sermon is made up almost exclusively of law. Any time we look at God's Word it is important to keep in mind the context and audience. Here we read: "***Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them.***" While there were most likely others who came to see Jesus whose popularity had started to boom, the audience is Jesus' disciples. He had called all 12 to follow him. What did this group look like? Let's just say it was not a very impressive looking group in the eyes of the world. There were no elders or Pharisees among them. Instead, this group of disciples included some fishermen, a zealot, and even a tax collector. To this group Jesus starts to teach.

Jesus begins with what are called the Beatitudes which are statements of blessings. Please understand Jesus is not giving us directions on how to save ourselves – that's impossible.

He is not even telling His disciples how to be blessed. Rather Jesus is simply describing the blessedness of all believers in Christ. Jesus is pointing out what His disciples really look like. What do disciples look like? They are poor in spirit. They mourn. They hunger and thirst. If you want to see what Jesus' disciples look like read about the tax collector, who would not even look up to heaven, but beat his own chest pleading: ***"God, have mercy on me, a sinner."*** Watch the sinful woman come to Jesus and wet His feet with her tears. Remember Peter running out of that courtyard after denying Jesus three times and weeping bitterly. Think of David after his sin of adultery tossing and turning each night and wetting his bed with his tears.

They are poor in spirit because they realize they have nothing to offer God. They mourn because of their sin. They hunger to be right with God once again. They thirst for forgiveness of sins. Now, because they are disciples of Jesus – they are blessed! Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Their sadness has been turned to joy for they are comforted. They will be filled as they feast on the bread of life and drink from an overflowing cup of forgiveness. So this is what blessed disciples look like!

They are also meek. They are peacemakers. They are merciful. They are pure in heart. You can see what disciples of Jesus look like in how they deal with others. They are not trying to grab the Super Bowl spotlight because they want to give glory to another. They turn the other cheek. They strive for peace. They take pity on others forgiving one another as they have been forgiven. Their hearts are right with God as they pray with David – ***"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit in me."*** (Psalm 51) How happy they are to be Jesus' disciples. They are called children of God. They will inherit the earth and be shown mercy. They will see God. So this is what blessed disciples look like!

Finally, we can see what Jesus' disciples look like by how they are treated by others. They are persecuted. They are insulted. People falsely say all kinds of evil things about them just because they follow Jesus and listen to His Word. Want to see what disciples of Jesus look like? Look at Paul who was beaten, flogged, and imprisoned many times. Read about Stephen who was stoned to death. Remember how these disciples sitting here at Jesus' feet were persecuted because of Jesus. Think of Christians today who are called intolerant or closed minded simply for speaking God's truth. Watch those today who lose friends or are made fun of because of Jesus. But would any one of them decide that being a disciple of Jesus is not worth it? No way! For they are blessed! They are able to rejoice and be glad, even in this kind of suffering, for heaven is waiting for them. They are not alone – the prophets were persecuted in the same way. So this is what blessed disciples of Jesus look like!

As I read through the Sermon on the Mount beginning here with these statements of blessings a couple things come to mind. While these beatitudes describe all Jesus' disciples to one degree or another – the first thing I see is my sin. I realize there is much room for growth as a disciple of Jesus. Don't you agree that as you look at these characteristics of discipleship you have room to grow too? But then I also remember that although many people might see this as Jesus' most famous sermon, Jesus' greatest message was not given on this mountainside but on another hill – Calvary. There on that hill is where Jesus really turned things around for us. Jesus takes our sin and gives us His righteousness. Jesus takes our death and gives us His life. Jesus suffers our hell so we can share in His heaven. Jesus goes into a grave so that we will come out of ours. Jesus went to a cross so we now will one day wear a crown.

I look around this room and what do I see here this morning? I see people who are poor and people who mourn. There are people here who sin has gotten the best of and people who have been devastated by guilt. People who realize they have nothing to offer God. I see people

who hunger and thirst. That's why you are here today to be filled. In here are people who are meek and merciful. I am looking at peacemakers and the pure of heart. I see people who have been and will be insulted, wronged, and persecuted. In other words, God has answered my prayer. Like when Jesus first preached these words I see His disciples sitting right here at His feet. I see people who will inherit the earth, people who are comforted, and people who have the kingdom of heaven. I see children of God who have been shown mercy and who will see God. I am looking at people who, no matter how much they are beat up or beaten down, are able to rejoice and be glad for great is their reward in heaven. So this is what blessed disciples of Jesus look like! Amen.