

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.

He said:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Not BE-attitude but Blessed

I attended Martin Luther College and let's just say there are a few odd traditions on campus. There is a group known as the Male Cheerleaders. It's an unofficial rag tag group of out of season football players who love sports. It's not that MLC doesn't have cheerleaders it's just that unofficial cheerleaders are more interesting, get the crowd involved, and excited through a series of goofy skits or games. One of the oddest cheers is when they shout, “role reversal!” The home team crowd vacates the bleachers runs out onto the court and the cheerleaders take a break as the crowd leads a cheer. This usually is a surprise to visiting teams and even refs who are accustomed to fans staying off the court.

There is something odd about our lesson. Jesus leads those who follow him and he begins to teach. He doesn't call out “role reversal” and switch seats with them but he has a reversal of his own as he pronounces blessings on those considered cursed. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, those who mourn. This reversal may come as a surprise. It's not opposites day. Jesus isn't calling bad: good and good: bad but what is considered cursed: blessed.

We don't usually think of those who struggle and suffer as blessed. When we suffer we're not exactly happy about it and quite possibly are questioning, "How am I blessed?" For some these words may come as an insult. Jesus is serious. He really means to bless us. These are his blessings, his beatitudes. Jesus pronounces his blessing over us. This is pure gospel as Jesus opens our eyes to the beatitudes - Not Be-attitude, but Blessed.

I say BE- attitude because some have led us to believe that in order for you to be blessed you have to be something. The beatitudes however is a word that comes from the Latin *beatus* which simply means blessing. The word beatitude is never used and it is only by unfortunate chance matches up with BE-attitude. Sadly some make these blessings conditional or even commands that you can fulfill. As if, "You want to be blessed? Then be poor, mourn, be meek..." It's a lot like that joke of the Buddhist contest - First one to eliminate all desire wins a free iPad.

Some see Jesus only as a great moral teacher - gives us a way to live and work your way back to God but if you judge yourself rightly according to the law you will find yourself cursed.

But these are blessings! This is a promise. It's salvation language. It means much more than happy or blessed could ever contain. These people are the recipients of divine favor. Blessed means God looks down with favor and smiles, on the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Jesus proclaims, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Jesus is not speaking about the financial situation of anyone. Jesus is concerned with spiritual, not material possessions. This is poor in spirit and while the poor in spirit are often the financially poor Jesus is not restricting the Kingdom of heaven from those who are successful. A vow of poverty does not good but is rather a denial of the good that God has given us. The poor in spirit understand that we have nothing of worth to offer God. We can do nothing to deliver ourselves from the curse of sin.

Jesus continues, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." The poor in spirit recognize their poverty and the dire need of those around them and that recognition of poverty leads to a reaction: mourning. Just as Jesus wept over Jerusalem so also are those blessed, mourn. This isn't just a once and done time to move on mourning but a life marked by continuous recognition of sin. Does that sound like confession?

Jesus again, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." Meek has a negative connotation in English however in Greek it was a virtue. It does not mean be a doormat. It means the proper response for each situation. The meek remain calm when others freak out. The meek place everything in the hands of God no matter what happens.

Jesus keeps going, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." His blessing goes out to those who hunger and thirst for his word. This

is a hunger that does not go away. A thirst that cannot be sated. One of the reasons many fast during the season of Lent is so that every time they feel hunger pangs they are drawn back to God and his work. *Blessed are the merciful, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted, and insulted.* This is not opposites day there is no role reversal but there is a reversal of sorts: Jesus proclaims blessings on those considered cursed.

If you're like me then you might be questioning, "Am I really blessed?" I might be able to finesse the first few but the rest are stretch. In fact even in regard to the first few I've failed. I've trusted in my work rather than Christ's work for me. On more than one occasion I've looked to the beatitudes as an instructional on how I can be blessed by God. I need to go through the motion and emotion and get it just right.

I think of the times I've searched for happiness in this life. I hunger and thirst for tacos and coffee - not righteousness. If you're like me maybe you too look for blessings in all of the wrong places, be it possessions, positions, or power. These so called "blessing" can bring sadness and emptiness. These so called "blessings" often end with us complaining against God when we fail to realize how blessed we already are. Fail to realize how God can use suffering as a blessing.

When we suffer God forces us to focus on our mortality as well as the broken world in which we live. He reminds us that what we have here and now will not last. God forces us to focus not on what we can gain in this world but to look ahead to the kingdom of God.

Yet when I read these blessings I often come to the conclusion that Jesus must be pronouncing his blessing on someone else. If you think he's speaking these blessings to someone else he changes the subject of his sentence and says, *"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"*

Not them. Not anyone else. But you. Those who gather around Jesus are blessed. Jesus begins to preach and teach proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven is here! You are blessed because there is forgiveness. Forgiveness for every arrogant spirit of superiority, for all those times we've rejoiced with the world, and hungered for what we could gain. This forgiveness - this righteousness is what we thirst for. Not a righteousness that comes from ourselves but a righteousness from God apart from the law.

That righteousness is found in the life, sacrifice, and resurrection of Jesus. He is our righteousness. He brought about the greatest role reversal of all time. When Jesus rushed out onto the court of life and we sat down and watched him work for us. He ascended and is now seated ruling this world and all suffering for the good of his church and he will come again to judge. We've already heard his verdict.

You are blessed because of Jesus. God does not call us to stand up and offer our own righteousness but to lean on him, his cross. That's a promise. That's a promise we received

in baptism. By our baptism we united to Christ in his death. His life has been credited to our account. He's reversed roles. That's justification. Justification = fancy word we explain as just as if i'd never sinned - but it's more than that. It's more than starting at ground zero, blank slate but a positive balance has been credited to your account. Not only are you made as if you've never sinned but you have the perfect life of Christ added to your reputation. These are not things you need to go be but who you are.

God now looks at us and says, "You are poor in spirit, you mourn, are meek, hunger for righteousness, are merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers." God has declared you righteous. The kingdom of heaven is yours. You have been comforted - you will be comforted again in the Sacrament, where Jesus body and blood are poured out for you to purify you. You've been blessed.

Since we are blessed - we can be a blessing to others. Do justice. Help the helpless, love kindness. Be merciful to all. Mourn over this world wrecked by sin. If the world persecuted the prophets and even Jesus too, they will persecute you. You no longer live but Christ lives in you. Not Be attitude but you are blessed.

Just as the Male Cheerleaders switched positions with the crowd; Jesus switched positions with us. Rejoice and be glad. You are blessed. You are holy. Yours is the kingdom of God. That is a blessing. That is a beatitude. The promise of your God. Amen.