

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

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 sons 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. (Matthew 5:1-12)*

God is Doing You a Favor

About eleven years ago, my wife and I bought our first minivan. Less than six months later, a semi sideswiped it and did \$9000 worth of damage. Since the weather had already turned bad, the body shop had a long line of vehicles ahead of ours. It took several weeks to get it back. We would've been without transportation during that time, but one of the members of our congregation did us a favor: he loaned us their second car until our van was fixed. It's easy to see how that would be a favor, right? But what about the guy who caused the accident? He cut across three lanes of traffic and caused five or six cars to crash. He sped away without even slowing down. Do you think he did me a favor? Obviously not. When someone does you a favor, they do something that benefits you, whether it's something as simple as holding a door for you or as demanding as helping you put a new roof on your house. This morning, Jesus talks to us about blessings. Nine times, he says, "Blessed." What does that mean? It means God is doing something good for the people who are in the situation Jesus refers to. In every one of those situations, **God is doing you a favor.**

Now, is Jesus really talking to us? Many of the phrases in these beatitudes, as they're called, have been applied to any situation that seems to have some similarity to Jesus' words. So when some diplomat hammers out a peace treaty, someone intones, "Blessed are the peacemakers." When some mousy person comes by good fortune, someone will say, "The meek will inherit the earth." But God was not speaking to every human being with these great words. Matthew says, "**His disciples came to him.**" Jesus' disciples are those who trust in him. Jesus is talking to us.

What Jesus says to us goes against all logic of this world. He says God is doing you a favor when you're poor in spirit. God is doing you a favor when you mourn. God is doing you a favor when you're meek and when you hunger and thirst after righteousness. God is doing you a favor when you're merciful and when you're pure in heart and when you have to make peace. God is doing you a favor when you're persecuted and insulted and falsely accused for the name of Christ. Our task this morning is to understand why.

Jesus said, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**" This is perhaps the hardest beatitude of all because it isn't easy to see what "poor in spirit" means. Many times, people mangle it and say, "Blessed are the poor" as if Jesus were talking about people who don't have enough money. But Jesus didn't say "Blessed are the poor." He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." What does it mean to be poor in

spirit? Being poor means that you lack wealth, right? Being poor in spirit also means that you lack something: comfort, trust, hope – in a word, faith. Now because Jesus was talking to his disciples, he was talking to people who do have faith. But he was talking to them when their faith is on trial. When we wrestle with our lives and it hurts. When we hear the law command us to live a certain way, and we feel guilty and we beat ourselves up. When sadness and longing take us and we wish that our Lord would return. In all these situations, we are poor in spirit. And Jesus says that God is doing you a favor when your spirit is poor and you long for his grace.

How can that be? Because the kingdom of heaven is yours. When you're longing for God's grace, God gives it. Only a believer knows how poor he is spiritually. Unbelievers generally traipse along on their merry way, figuring that they're good people and God must be watching out for them. Only a believer worries about whether he has enough faith. Only a believer worries about whether or not his faith will last until he dies. Only a believer hears God command us to do so much and sighs because he can't make any more excuses about his sins and failures. But that believer also knows that God sent Jesus to take all that sin and failure away. However weak our faith may be, however troubled our consciences may be as we struggle along in this world, however much we long to see our Lord appear, even a mustard seed of faith is faith. And we who have faith in Christ will live with Christ.

Jesus said, **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”** God is doing you a favor when you've lost a loved one or when you're grieving some terrible affliction. Because he will comfort you. All that hurt reminds us that we are dust. Even for a newborn baby, this life is almost over. But God has given us everlasting life. He comes to us in that promise and he eases our pain. He comforts us by promising that the life that's coming will be better. He comforts us when he reminds us that he has carefully chosen which hurts we have to face today. Every one will work for our good.

Jesus said, **“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”** The meek are the humble, the unassuming, the people who don't need to be in the spotlight. In this life, that's no way to get ahead. If you want a job, you have to go after it. Our society tells you to have ambition and to go for the gold. And that works here. But when God makes you a humble person, a person who serves others, he is doing you a favor. Our society might consider you to be crippled and send you for assertiveness training. But God values humility. God values the person who trusts in his Savior enough not to push themselves forward. The truth is, humility is a gift God gives. We can't achieve it on our own. God is doing you a favor when he makes you humble because you will live and reign with him when he returns. He will seat you on a throne next to him and give you the crown of life. You will live with him in a perfect world forever.

Jesus said, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”** Again, he's not talking about lack of food and water. He's talking about those who long to see a more righteous world. It's so easy for us to become calloused to how godless our society has become. You know why we become calloused? Because it hurts less. Longing for a righteous world hurts more. It hurts to see our country racing down the path to accepting homosexuality and approving living together and granting abortion as an absolute right. Every step our society takes away from God should fill our hearts with sadness. But who wants to be full of sadness? Yet, God is doing you a favor when he gives you a heart that mourns over the way sin runs rampant here because that mourning shows that you are his and that you look forward to the day when his word will reign supreme. You will be filled. Jesus will return and cast all sin out of this world. And we will live in harmony with God.

Jesus said, **“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”** Now, this one doesn't seem so bad, does it? But how do you feel when a poor person asks you for help? It happens to me quite often. People call the church looking for a handout. You know what? It's hard to put yourself out and be merciful. It's hard to spend my time and my money on those people. When we face that struggle and remind ourselves that Jesus said, “I was hungry and you fed me. I needed clothes and you clothed me,” and we show mercy, then God is doing us a favor. He is conquering our selfishness. In Christ, God has forgiven the selfish part of our hearts. On Judgment Day, he will show mercy to us who have a built-in sinner who fights against his call to be merciful. But every step that Jesus takes to purify our hearts and lives here is also a favor he does us.

So Jesus said, **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”** Who is pure in heart? Only the person who lives for Jesus because our Lord washed his sins away with his own blood. You know how hard living for Jesus really is. You know how many temptations come out of your own heart that's supposed to be

pure. We can only be pure in heart when God works through the gospel and forgives us and then leads us to live for him. And because he does that, we will see God.

Jesus said, **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”** Jesus is not talking about Nobel Peace Prize winners. He’s talking to his disciples. He’s talking about making peace among us. I’m continually amazed at how many times the New Testament tells us believers to forgive each other. You don’t tell people to forgive each other unless there’s something to forgive – unless there’re sins that we’ve committed against each other. My friends, do you think that it could ever happen that right here at Peace Lutheran Church, some of our members could get angry at each other? That they could hold grudges? It’s not only possible, it’s probable, because we’re sinners and the devil knows that if we’re fighting, we aren’t preaching the gospel. It’s hard to be a peacemaker. It consumes enormous amounts of time and spiritual energy. Half the time, the people who are mad at each other get mad at you because you won’t leave it alone. But God is doing you a favor when you have to shoulder that burden. He’s sharing Christ’s own work of love with you.

Finally, Jesus says, **“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.”** God is doing you a favor when people tell lies about you and slander you because you confess your faith. Now it still hurts. But God is doing you a favor because persecution means that you belong to him. The world hates believers because it hated Christ! Rejoice and be glad that so many people hate us because we have a greater reward than popularity and respect here. We have eternal life with Jesus who loves us.

God is doing you a favor in all those situations. Do you believe that? It’s easy to say yes when we’re sitting in here and it’s all very theoretical. But it’s a lot harder when we’re in the hospital waiting room, when we’ve got some person in our face spouting lies, when we’re longing for relief from spiritual pain. My friends, can you honestly declare that you trust God in all these things and that you consider every hurt in your life to be a blessing from God? Or do you have to admit, like I do, that all too often, you grumble and complain? Do you kick things and mutter under your breath and scowl and pout?

Trust is the hardest thing for us because it’s the exact opposite of sin. The heart of our sin is pride. That means that we put ourselves first. So we don’t want to show mercy to the next person who comes with their hand out. We don’t want to hurt. We think God owes us something better because the natural state of our heart is to worship ourselves. God doesn’t owe us anything, except death and hell for being little idol worshippers.

But Jesus came to take our sin away. He died because we naturally put ourselves first. He died because it’s so hard for us to trust in God and see all these difficult realities as good things that he is doing because he loves us. Jesus died for these sinful hearts and all the ways that our sin comes out. Then he rose. In that resurrection, he burned away all our sin. To God, we have always been the believer that Jesus was. We have trusted him totally and without fail, because that’s what Jesus did. Because God has given us all that Jesus did, he continues to come to us in love and make us face all these hard, good things that he works through to give us one blessing after another.

You know what? Jesus treats all believers like that. Today is All Saints Day. Today we remember that we’re part of a great procession of believers marching through this life to the life to come. Every one of those believers who went before us had to go through all these things. God loved them all and he blessed them. And he loves us just as much. So every day, in every hardship and in every joy, God is doing you a favor. He is working to keep your faith alive. He is working to give you eternal life with him. Take comfort in that love. Amen.