

Jesu Juva

“A Blessed Reality”

Text: Matthew 5:1-12 (1 John 3:1-3; Revelation 7:9-17)

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

When we hear the Beatitudes - those declarations of blessedness that we heard this morning from Matthew - our first inclination is usually to hear them as “if-then,” conditional statements; a roadmap to blessedness. If I do this, then I will be that. If I do these things, then God will bless me in these ways. In such a scheme - which seems quite natural to us because, after all, that’s by-and-large the way our world works - blessedness is something earned by us from God. Like at school - if you study and work hard and do well on the test, you will get an A. Or at work - if you work hard and are successful, you will be promoted and get a raise. That must be how it is with God as well.

Except it isn’t.

For upon closer examination, it seems there’s something else going on here. For if you look at what is said, of the nine declarations of who is blessed, six are future tense - “they shall be;” but the other three are present tense, statements of fact - theirs “is.” And these three present tense statements of fact bracket, or frame, the other six. They are the bread of this blessed sandwich, which holds it all together. They are *the reality* from which all the blessedness comes. And those three all state this, this reality: you are blessed, already here, already now, because *yours is the kingdom of heaven*.

Or you can think of it like this - suppose I was to say: *Blessed is the son of Mr. Jones for he will inherit the family business*. The son is not working to inherit the business - he already is, by virtue of his being the son. He already has that blessing by virtue of his relationship with his father. Knowing that, then, impacts how he lives; how he works; and his view of the future.

And so it is with Christians, with us. The Beatitudes start off with Jesus stating: ***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven***. So who are so blessed? Those who know they have nothing to offer God; they are spiritually poor, spiritually bankrupt. In fact, even worse than that - they are hopelessly in debt for the sins they have done and the good they have failed to do. To be poor in spirit is to tremble before such a God and His Word. ***The poor in spirit*** are, therefore, those who know that not only do we need everything from God, but that all that we receive is, therefore, undeserved; a gracious, generous gift from Him. And to such poor, miserable sinners, God says: *I forgive you. Your debt is cancelled. And even more, I will adopt you into my family. I will care for you and provide for you. I will have you live in my kingdom forever.*

That, Jesus wants you to know, right off the bat, is who God is; who your heavenly Father is. The One who to the spiritually poor, the spiritually bankrupt, is kind, merciful, and gracious. If you come before Him with your list of demands, thinking that you deserve something from Him or have earned it, you will leave with nothing. But to those who come trembling, to *the poor in spirit*, you have this kind of God: *yours is the kingdom of heaven*.

And that's what we confess at the beginning of every service here. That's what we're saying. And we speak this confession every week not just because it is the truth, but so that we may **learn this truth**; so that we may slay once again that ugly monster of spiritual pride within each of us, who wants to come here with something for God, who comes for a pat on the back for all the good we think we've done this week, while at the same time ignoring all the sin we've done in thought, word, deed, and desire, through action and inaction. We speak the truth when we confess that we *deserve nothing but God's present and eternal punishment*. But in response, God speaks the truth too, when you hear Him say: *I forgive you all your sins*. They are. You do not get what you deserve; instead, *yours is the kingdom of heaven*.

And that because the Son of God, whose kingdom it is, has made you sons and daughters of God in Him. He took all those sins you confess, including that ugly monster of spiritual pride, and with them your punishment, to the cross, to give you a kingdom. He was condemned that you be forgiven. He became poor to make you rich. He entered into your death to give you resurrection and life. And when you were baptized, all that became yours. You who have nothing were given everything. The spiritually poor made rich. Or as John put it today: *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are*. Present tense, statement of fact. This is who you are. In Jesus.

And then from that reality, from what you are in Jesus, flows everything else. Not because you earn it, but because of who you are, a child of God. Promise upon promise, gift upon gift, blessed upon blessed.

You will mourn. Mourn your sin, mourn the sin in the world, mourn death, mourn the godlessness of many . . . but you will not go comfortless.

You will be meek. Which is not to be arrogant and aggressive and violent; not grabbing and getting at the expense of others . . . and yet you will not suffer want.

Your hunger and thirst for the righteousness, the holiness, that you know you do not have . . . will not go unsatisfied; you will receive and be filled.

Your mercy to others will not leave you without mercy.

Hearts washed and made pure from sin and from the clouds of fear and death will see God - see Him here where He has promised to be, and also see Him in others, those He has gathered to us and given to us.

Your peacemaking, your forgiveness given to those who sin against you, will reveal the son of God you are.

And when you are persecuted for all this, ***your is still the kingdom of heaven***. It is not a sign of God's disfavor or disapproval. It is what ***they did to the prophets who were before*** the apostles, and the apostles who were before you, and to you before the saints who will come after you.

All of that is exemplified in Jesus, but is also in His children; is also now in you as you live in Him and He in you. As you are fed with His Body and Blood and become what you eat. As the Spirit lives and works in you all that is pleasing to your Father in heaven. That's the reality that is you and yours, Jesus wants you to know, in Him.

But it is a reality that now, however, **is hidden**. That's what John went on to say after naming our reality as children of God. He said: ***The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared.***

What we are, John says, *is not what we appear to be*. And you could reverse that too: *what we appear to be is not what we are*. For when you look at yourself, when you look at other Christians - both your fellow Christians here and around the world - what do you see? You see people who do not look holy, but who look like sinners. You see folks who often do not look blessed, but in fact cursed. You see men and women who look perhaps just like everyone else, with many of the same troubles and struggles and failings.

So John's words here are an important reminder to us: who we are is not who we say we are, or what we feel like, or what seems to us. That's the way the world is going these days, right? You are whatever gender you say you are. What you feel is the truth. Judge by what seems good to you. But the Scriptures say something quite different than that. That who we are is not from us or what we say, and blessedness is not what we say it is either. We are who God says we are, and blessedness is what He says it is. And it must be that way. For our perspective is limited - like with an iceberg, we see only a fraction of what God is doing in this world. Our knowledge lacking - you know who the smartest people in the world are? Those who know how much they don't know. And our judgment often wrong - how often do things turn out quite differently than we expect? But not with God. Who sees all, knows all, and judges justly. We are who He says we are, and blessedness is what He says it is.

And so we are perhaps like children who want ice cream for breakfast but get oatmeal instead. Such children often think they are cursed with mean parents, when the reality is quite different - they have been blessed with *loving* parents who want them to be healthy and so will give them only what is good for them, even if it might not be exactly what they want or crave. How blessed we are to have such a Father in heaven, who will give us only what is good for us. Who calls us His children and we are. Who calls us blessed and we are. Who speaks and it is so.

And the time is coming . . . the time is coming when we will see the reality that has been true all along. When we will look and see what John saw: ***a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.*** And even better: we will experience and live in what John saw: *we will be sheltered in the presence of God; we will hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; we will rest beside the living water our Shepherd provides for us; and have every tear wiped away from our eyes by our Father.*

Like John, we only see that now from a distance, by faith. But on this All Saints Day, we rejoice that those who have gone before us in the faith now enjoy that blessed rest. That their hidden blessedness in this world and life has been revealed in the next. God is faithful.

And when John looked and saw that vision of heaven, who did he see? The prophets of the Old Testament. His fellow apostles, including his brother James who was martyred. His father Zebedee, perhaps, and his mother.

Who do you see? A parent, a spouse, a child, a friend, a brother or sister? Maybe they struggled mightily with cancer while they lived, or maybe *they feebly struggled* in other ways (LSB #677 v. 4). Maybe, as we sang, *despised and scorned were they as they sojourned here* (LSB #676 v. 2). The reality of who they were, hidden. *But now how glorious they appear! All the saints, who from their labors rest.*

And that is the rest that now awaits you. A rest that we can already now enjoy in Jesus by faith, but which will be in all its fullness when Jesus returns to take you home. That is your blessedness, even now. Even now if there be persecution. Even now if there be tribulation. Your Father, Your Saviour, and Their Spirit have claimed you as His own. He has called you His child and so you are. And so you are a saint, a holy person, who has been washed cleaned in the blood of the Lamb. And so today is your day. Your day to rejoice in your God and all His promises to you. A rejoicing that will never end, for your today is not this 24 hour day we call Sunday - but the new day you have been born again into, the day of eternity, that will never end. Blessed are you.

And so we rejoice with all the saints and they rejoice with us, with the angels and archangels, all gathered around the Lamb - the Lamb on His throne, the Lamb on His

altar. One holy communion. The Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's who you are.
Blessed in Him. Now and forever.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.