

How are you doing this morning? Years ago, there was a gentleman here at St. Paul's who came to church every Sunday. Every Sunday, I asked him the same question: "How are you doing?" And every Sunday he would offer the same answer: "Blessed!"

How many of us would give that same response today? Not only is "Blessed" a "churchy" thing to say, it's a fashion statement in home decor.

How do you determine if you are "Blessed"? Would you take an inventory of your life? "My health has been pretty good, it could be a lot worse. I've got a roof over my head and food in the fridge. I've got friends to talk to. You know what? I am pretty blessed." But what if some, or all of those things were taken away, would you still consider yourself "Blessed"?

While the world tells us to find blessings in one direction; Jesus, as he often does, points us in the opposite direction to some unusual places where he promises his blessings. Where does he tell us to look?

He tells us to look at his words in today's gospel that we commonly call "The Beatitudes." Which is another name for "Blessings."

Before we get at Jesus' words, we want to make sure we don't overlook his audience. Luke tells us: **A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.**

A big crowd came to hear Jesus and they came from all over the place. Some were followers of his – believers. Some weren't followers – they didn't believe. They just wanted to see the man everyone was talking about.

On that day he taught both the believers and unbelievers, but when it came to "The Beatitudes" he targets a specific audience: **Looking at his**

**disciples, he said.** That may not seem significant, but it is. *The Beatitudes* are NOT directions in how to BECOME a Christian. They're an encouragement for Christian living for those who ALREADY are Christians. As each Christian lives their life, Jesus promises to bring his **Blessings** into their lives ... in some rather unusual situations.

Luke records Jesus' words with 2 lists. There are 4 statements on each list. The first has 4 statements of **blessing**. The second has 4 statements of **warning, or woe**.

These statements of **blessing** and **warning** are direct opposites: *poor ... rich, hungry ... well fed, weep ... laugh, hate ... speaks well of you.*

The **blessings** target spiritual things, while the **warnings** target physical things. Let's take a closer look at each of the **blessings**.

**Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.**

**Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.**

**Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.**

**Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.**

Do you think it's strange where Jesus says we'll find blessings? If you asked someone how their week is going and they said: "I'm poor, hungry, sad and hated." I'd hope you wouldn't respond: "That's great to hear!" And yet, that's where Jesus tells us we'll find blessings. Remember he's talking about spiritual things here.

**Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.** The psalmist wrote: "**No one can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for them – the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough.**" I'm poor and have nothing that could possibly pay the price to escape sin's punishment. I'm a bankrupt beggar. And so are you. Our good works, our patience, our putting

ourselves out for others will never be enough to reach God's standard of perfection.

Only when you and I realize that we can't contribute a single thing to our salvation, can we find peace in knowing Jesus paid it all. When poor sinners depend on the riches of Christ's grace, we're blessed!

**Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.** We probably don't think of hunger as a good thing. Hunger pains drive us to get the nutrition our bodies need to live.

Spiritual hunger is a good thing for the Christian. It's a great thing. Our souls need to be hungry for the forgiveness Jesus offers. That hunger comes from seeing and confessing my sinful weaknesses, not hiding them. Admitting to my God and to myself that once again I fell for Satan's lies and gave in to the sinful world around me. Only in Christ can my hunger and your hunger be met. We're blessed!

**Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.** The world tells us that we should never feel sad about anything. Don't worry, be happy! Jesus identifies a blessing for those who weep. We get sad when we realize something is broken ..... a relationship, a trust, a promise, a friendship. We, as Christians, weep because we've broken something God gave to us. The Apostle Paul tells us the purpose of sadness over sin: ***"Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret."*** God doesn't want us to stay miserable. Sadness over sin leads to repentance. Repentance always leads us to Jesus and his words: *"You are forgiven. You are loved. You are mine."* How can that not bring a smile to our face, and joy to our heart? When we weep with a repentant heart, we're blessed!

**Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.**

There's a tiny phrase in this verse that may slip past us unnoticed, but it speaks volumes. Here's the phrase: ***"Because of the Son of Man."***

As Christians, we don't go around looking to be hated and insulted. What Jesus, the Son of Man, is talking about are the difficulties that come to us because we're living the Christian life and our faith-connection with him.

- That would be the teenager who is made fun of because they wouldn't vandalize property.
- That would be the woman who gets bashed on Facebook because she believes that life begins at conception.
- That would be the man who loses his promotion because he wouldn't do something illegal for his boss.
- That would be the parents who are told they are no longer welcome at their daughter's house because they refuse to support her sinful lifestyle.

Where is the blessing in any of this? That tiny phrase. These difficulties are evidence of a person's relationship with the Son of Man. Yes, our relationship with Jesus will bring difficulties. But as painful as they are, they won't last. We're blessed because our relationship with Jesus stands the test of time and eternity.

Let's quickly glance at Jesus' second list, the warnings: **Woe to you who are rich, who are well fed, who laugh and when everyone speaks well of you.** Most would consider themselves *"blessed"* by these things. There's nothing wrong with any of them, they're all gifts given to us by God. But again and again Jesus warns us that yes, while they can bring pleasure, they can also rob us of our eternal inheritance. That happens when we no longer see Jesus as our most valuable treasure.

Remember, Jesus is talking to people just like us, his disciples. He knows the daily temptations we face as his followers.

The purpose for his blessing and warning statements is to keep us in the only place that promises real and lasting blessings. For only in Jesus can we always say, *"We're Blessed."*