

"We Are Blessed!"
by Rev. Frances Savill
Sunday November 5, 2023
Remembrance Sunday

Matthew 5:1-12

The word "Blessed" in Greek means closer to lucky - the new English Bible translates it "Happy" which also captures the meaning pretty well.

So lucky are the poor in spirit,
lucky are those who mourn,
lucky are the meek,
lucky are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
lucky are the merciful,
lucky are the pure in heart,
lucky are the peacemakers,
lucky are the persecuted,

Lucky are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, says Jesus.

We all saw some of the unexpected blessings that came out of COVID, God works in mysterious ways. So, let's look and listen closely to Jesus.

Imagine Jesus walking in our midst - laying a hand on your shoulder as he passes you. Speaking to us, His people - when he knows we are having a difficult time.

Blessed are the poor in spirit - for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
What does it mean to be poor in spirit?

Eugene Peterson translates it **"you're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.** Most of us here know something about being at the end of our ropes. Those times remind us how much we need God. Those who cry out to God, the king of heaven draws near.

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

This morning we remember members of the church who have died in the last year, the list is long of dear friends. Many of you could add others to the list of your friends and family.

There are other kinds of losses other than the death of friends and loved ones. Some of us have had to give up plans and dreams, hopes, and expectations. And to everyone who has experienced loss, and has mourned Jesus says we will be comforted.

God is present to the broken-hearted. God provides comfort and hope, strength to put one foot in front of the other. When our hearts are broken open, they become open to the embrace and comfort of God.

We mourn our losses, but we also mourn the state of the world, the injustice, the pain of others, the brokenness of our world – and God draws near.

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

Have you ever met anyone with a servant's heart? The meek, the humble in spirit? Those who don't have to win, and in fact are usually playing a different game from the worlds. We usually find them wasting their gifts on those least deserving.

Sometimes they are Doctors or Nurses who have left their high paying jobs and gone to do relief work among the ultimate outcasts, leprosy patients in India, or refugees in Somalia or the Sudan, Ethiopia, or Bangladesh.

Sometimes they are PhD's who have left the ivy towers of universities and exchanged them for jungles in South America translating Bibles.

Sometimes they are ordinary folks who give their talents, whatever they are, blessing those most in need around them, here or elsewhere.

Others use their vacations, not to go on cruises, but to build a house, or work in a school, or support a development project, or help a friend.

They work long hours, have low pay and no applause for their work. Somehow though, in the process of losing their lives they find them. In being with these servants you find in them a depth and richness and even joy in their lives that is not found in the stars of the world.

On this All-Saints Day we remember some of those folks, giving thanks to God for their example. I believe Jesus' promise that they are the ones blessed and that they are the ones who will ultimately inherit the earth.

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

Showing mercy means caring for others who are in pain or suffering. It means ministering to the needs of others, sharing their pain.

Jesus' sermon on the mount teaches a very different ethic than many people seem to learn. Many people who claim to follow Jesus develop a morality that hardens and makes them more severe with others. The first test of Jesus' ethic is not about self-righteousness or taking a hard stand against sin, but rather showing mercy towards others.

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

Sin separates us from God. But when we deal with the sin in our lives, when we turn from it, when we ask God to teach us a different way, when we are disciplined with ourselves - and deal with honesty and integrity before God and in the world, something happens - Jesus promises that the pure in heart will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God and blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Peacemakers are people like Martin Luther King who fought for justice but used non-violent methods. Peacemakers are those who work for wholeness for all people, who bring the shalom of God to the lives of others. Jesus' promise is that they are children of God and theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

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

In all these cases, in all these who have given their lives for the sake of Christ and have in losing their lives found them we see the truth that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. The kingdom is coming in all its fullness.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on My account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

When we are engaged in showing mercy, in being agents of God's justice bringing wholeness, when we are pure in heart in the midst of the corruption of this world, we will be persecuted – we will have trouble – it will not be easy.

There is much that is distressing these days, our news is filled with stories of trouble. But now is the time of blessing, because we are God's people. This is not what we expected blessing would look like or feel like. It is not a life of ease or comfort. It is not a life free from care – it is the opposite.

We are being stretched, and challenged, we are called to be light, and to be people of hope, we are called to be servants, who invite others into the kingdom of God.

And we are people who proclaim right here, right now we are blessed, because God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit is with us, and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus our Lord.

Thanks be to God.