

**St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)**  
**All Saints Day – November 3, 2024**  
**Matthew 5:1-12 – The Beatitudes**  
**Rev Peter Wagner**

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

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” But these words of the Beatitudes, these beautiful blessings do not apply to the sons of this world. Poor in spirit? No, they put themselves first. They mock Christ and his church. Nor do they mourn over their sins. If they ever seek comfort, it's not for their sin, but for the comforting pleasures of this world.

And as for the meek, what this world admires is not meekness, but assertiveness and self-confidence. As for the peacemakers, peace is far from our country. Bitterness and anger are the norm in the public sphere. And no one seeks God's mercy, no one hungers and thirsts for the true righteousness of God in the forgiveness of sins. And why would they, because they do not believe in him at all. And if they do not believe he exists, why would they wish to see God? Yet they will see God, on the Last Day. They will see him in the terror of his wrath.

So rather than the Beatitudes, the woes of Jesus in Luke 6 apply more appropriately to the sons of this world, “Woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.”

And we Christians are hardly innocent either. Our quickness to defend ourselves and point the finger only feeds the fire, proving their suspicion that we're all hypocrites, clean on the outside but evil within. Truly there is none righteous, no not one. No one deserves to be called a saint, a holy one. No one is perfect before God, no one deserves the blessings of the Beatitudes for what they have done.

But to us in the church, Jesus has a precious and comforting promise. “Blessed are you when others 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 so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

Yes, we ought to rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. Rejoice, when the church is criticized and silenced, when public prayer is condemned and confessing Jesus is demonized, when upholding the morality of the Ten Commandments is labeled Christian nationalism. Rejoice, for these sufferings are minor, our burden is light, and our reward is in heaven.

But when we suffer, let us be careful to suffer on his account, and not on account of our own folly. Let us never answer evil with evil, sharpness with sharpness. Let us bear our cross as Jesus did, answering evil with patience, accusation with silence, contempt with humility.

The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him, the Righteous One. For there is only one Holy and Blessed One, one true Saint. The only Saint is the one who spoke these words of the Beatitudes, Jesus Christ the righteous. Jesus is the one who is poor in spirit, who came in humble poverty, not to glorify himself, but to reveal his glory in the shame of the cross and his suffering and death. Yet by that cross Jesus has obtained for himself the Kingdom of Heaven. For his is the kingdom of heaven.

Yes, Jesus is the Blessed One because he came in weakness and mourning for the sins of the world, to comfort sinners by his blood. Jesus is the one who was meek, clothed in humility, seeking nothing for himself. Yet now he has inherited the earth and he reigns over all things.

And only Jesus is truly pure in heart, purifying those who put their trust in him. And he alone sees God. He sees the Father and reveals the Father to whom he will. In him alone you see God, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

And Jesus is the true peacemaker. He has made peace between us and God. Our Prince of Peace has broken down the wall of hostility between sinners and the righteous God. Therefore to him belongs the kingdom of heaven, and the power and the glory forever.

Truly no one is righteous, no one deserves the promises of the Beatitudes, apart from Christ. Only in Christ do you come in. None of the Beatitudes are about you, it's always about someone else: the meek, the poor in spirit, the merciful. It's not about you until Jesus says, “Blessed are you when men utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.” You are only incorporated into the Beatitudes on my account. On my account, says Jesus, you have a share in me. On my account you inherit my kingdom and are called sons of God with me.

On my account you will share all my good things, but not yet. Suffering and persecution on my account are what Jesus promises you now. For now, you are called to suffer and be persecuted, to be reviled and suffer all kinds of evil on his account, to bear your cross and follow him.

But do not lose heart. For you are his already. Already, through baptism, you are called sons of God. “Beloved, we are God’s children now.” Already the blessings of the kingdom of heaven are yours – to be satisfied in righteousness, to obtain mercy from God in the blood of Jesus.

Yes, already you are counted righteous by the blood of the Lamb. He already calls you saints, sealed by the seal of the living God, numbered among the baptized, promised to inherit the kingdom. Already Jesus has brought you to the springs of living water in the waters of holy baptism, and he promises to wipe every tear from your eyes.

Yes, the promises of Jesus are yours already. It’s as good as done. Jesus promises you the kingdom. He promises to make peace with God for you. He promises not a temporary reward on this earth, not momentary satisfaction and riches, but eternal riches in the life to come. “Your reward is great in heaven.”

And those who have gone before us, who have died in the faith, already enjoy these blessings. They hunger no more, neither thirst anymore. The sun does not strike them nor any scorching heat, for the Lamb in the midst of the throne – the one who in whom they put their trust, the one who obtained peace with God for them by his blood, who washed them and put his seal of holy baptism on them to keep them for eternity – the Lamb in the midst of the throne is their Shepherd. And he who brought them to springs of living water in baptism, now he has wiped every tear from their eyes.

They are the saints of the church triumphant, standing around the throne of God with palm branches in their hands. They are the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us.

But for now, we remain on earth. We belong to the church militant. We must wait here, and suffer persecution and distress. We must be persecuted and reviled, and the world will utter all kinds of evil against us falsely on account of our Good Shepherd. We must bear our cross.

And we do it poorly. We sin constantly, we fail to confess Christ boldly. “We feebly struggle, they in glory shine.” So help us, O Lord. Strengthen us, just as you strengthened Martin Luther and the Reformers to fight for your truth in their day, strengthen us now in this evil day. Fight for us once again. Because there are many who speak against your church, O God. Many hate and despise your word. They do not believe you are the only way, truth, and life.

And they slander us and lead your children astray. They teach young women that abortion, murdering the child you created in their own womb is acceptable. They teach young boys and girls that changing from one gender to another is good, that you are to blame for trapping them in the wrong body. And they teach all our young people that the church is power hungry, that we are just trying to brainwash them and control them for our own gain.

So strengthen us for the fight, O Lord. Defend us from these lies. And when we grow discouraged, remind us that we do not fight alone. In the victory of Christ are we promised the victory, and all the good things that come with it.

Amen, Lord. Strengthen us for the fight. Defend your church militant, that we may run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, who bore the cross, despising its shame, and now sits at the right hand of the throne of God.

And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, refresh us again with that distant triumph song. The song of the saints triumphant, singing before the Lamb. “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.” Let their song be our constant hope, our certain joy, and our true comfort. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.