

November 3, 2019

What Is In Store For Us? | Installation Sermon / St. Paul Lutheran, Waseca

Rev. Dr. Larry Griffin

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Matthew 5 Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Dear Friends in Christ,

One of my favorite stories out of Janesville has to do with a strong woman of faith named Agnes who lived into her late 80's, maybe even her 90's. She came to every Bible class her pastors ever taught. She knew her Bible well, she was the daughter of a former pastor, she spent time in the mission field, and as she approached her death, she made me promise that I wouldn't say nice things at her funeral. She wanted the entire focus to be on Jesus Christ. In fact, she went a step further than that. She insisted that during her funeral sermon I should point at her casket and declare that Agnes just got what she deserved! As in “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life.”

You see, Agnes knew what was in store for her. To use the words of Jesus, she was exceedingly glad for she knew her reward in heaven was great. She knew that in the waters of Baptism the Triune God had claimed her as a precious and forgiven child of God. She knew that Jesus was her Good Shepherd following her around with goodness and mercy. She knew by faith that the day was coming when the angels would take her soul into the very presence of God, the day was coming when Jesus would return one more time, the archangel would be shouting, the trumpet will be blowing, and that she would be one of a great multitude which no one could number. Their robes will be white, they would be waving palm branches of victory, and God would be wiping away all of their tears into eternity.

We worship today as the people of God, who, like Agnes know what's in store for us into the future. We know that in Christ, we are blessed with the forgiveness of sins here and now, and the day is coming when the pure pleasures of paradise will be ours.

And yet questions remain. You may be asking what kind of pastor this short gray haired heavy set preacher from Janesville is going to be. Will he ever get his sermons preached in less than 22 minutes? (Hasn't happened so far!) Will he be approachable? Will he lay down his life for us in response to the Good Shepherd laying down his life for his sheep? Does he know what he's doing? And what's all this about an intentional interim pastor? Has he been an unintentional pastor up to this point?

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I have a few questions myself today. I'm wondering if I can figure out how to open a new document on my laptop. I'm wondering if I will get lost in the lower level of this beautiful and large church building. More importantly, I'm wondering what are the unique challenges this congregation is facing. I'm wondering what these next 12 or more months will be bringing. And I'm wondering and asking today, "what is in store for us in our life together?"

The simple answer in our text for today is that as often as we try to do this life together apart from Jesus Christ, we're going to be the opposite of blessed, which is cursed. But as often as we fix our eyes on Jesus Christ, the road will be well-lit, and the Word of God will be a lamp unto our feet.

The text for today is the beginning of the most famous sermon ever preached. This sermon Jesus is preaching primarily to his disciples, with large crowds straining in the background to listen in.

The Beatitudes are not prescriptive, but descriptive. They not prescribe to us how to become blessed, rather they describe the blessedness that already belongs to all believers in Christ. Professor Scaer from the Ft. Wayne Seminary writes that the Beatitudes "are first of all Christological descriptions of Jesus, then descriptions of his followers.

- Story of a man I'll call John / as I approached him in the nursing home in his final days, he saw who I was and hollered not once, but twice, get out of here, He wanted nothing to do with a preacher preaching God's Word.
- Story of my mom in her latter days / waking up and asking me why I was crying / I say because you're dying / she assures me that she's going to be in a really good place.

³ **"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** Apart from Christ, whenever the sinful nature is in charge, we are full of ourselves, we imagine that our own efforts to live a good life will be sufficient, we are on a collision course with an eternal nightmare. But as often as we admit that we are poor and miserable sinners, as often as we acknowledge that our best efforts fall way short of God's glory, as long as we are that empty vessel ready to be filled, that often we get credit for Jesus Christ living the perfect life, we get credit for Jesus offering up the one bloody sacrifice to end all sacrifices, the kingdom of heaven is ours, we can say with my mom, "I'm going to be in a really good place.

⁴ **"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.** Apart from Christ, as often as the sinful nature is in control, we live comfortably in our sinful ways, we see no particular

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need to be repenting or confessing or changing our ways. But as often as we mourn, as often as we cry out with broken and contrite hearts, as often as we throw ourselves on the mercy of Almighty God, that often we find comfort, that often the absolution spoken by the pastor in the name of and by the command of Jesus has a way of wiping away our tears, that often the angels and archangels of heaven break out in rejoicing.

⁵ **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.** Apart from Christ, the sinful nature rises up inside of us and has its way. The boisterous and the noisy and the demanding side of us stands up and causes trouble. Apart from Christ, we hear ourselves insisting it’s going to be my way or the highway. But as often as we are still and know that God is God, as often as we rest in the holiness of God, we find that the Holy Spirit works among us a gentle and a patient spirit, we find it possible to turn the other cheek and to walk the extra mile whenever the Kingdom of God has an opportunity to advance.

⁶ **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.** Apart from Christ, as often as the sinful nature is in charge, we have little or no desire for the things of God. We find church to be boring, the Lord’s Supper to be unnecessary, and the grace of God to be no big deal. We chase after all these other things in life, as do the pagans, and the Holy Spirit has little if any opportunity to turn us around. But when given the chance, the Holy Spirit works inside of us a hunger for the bread of life, He works in us a thirst for Him who is the fountain of life, we find that we want to see Jesus and be close to Jesus not just on Sunday mornings but 7 days a week and especially in days of trouble.

- Story of Mom, with her pastor, the hospice chaplain, her daughters, and her son the pastor all praying with her, singing hymns, she gets to the point of being really tired, I ask “Mom, should the pastor keep on singing and praying and reading the Bible? She answers, “that’s enough for now.” We are reminded of Hymn 54 in The Lutheran Hymnal, Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah, verse 1 ending with “Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more.”

⁷ **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.** ⁸ **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.**

As often as the sinful nature is standing up and ruling on the inside of us, we walk right on by people in need just as did the priest and the Levite, but in Christ, we walk in the footsteps of the Good Samaritan, helping out even when it’s out of our comfort zone.

⁸ **“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”** ⁹ Out of our hearts come words that we really don’t mean, our good intentions often go awry, and it’s easy to see so many of

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our bones that are selfish. In Christ, the Spirit works in us a heart that speaks and acts without ulterior motives.

.⁹ **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons^[a] of God.** Apart from Christ, we passively sit back and watch conflicts escalate. Or we say that which makes matters worse. But when the Spirit of God is guiding, we actively strive to make peace where there is hostility. We point one another again and again to Jesus who suffered all that he was appointed to suffer for us, He was crucified until he was dead and buried for us, He rose up again on the third day, he ascended into heaven on the 40th day, he poured out his spirit on the 50th day – and all of us on our behalf. He is the peace that surpasses all of our understanding and transcends every one of our human circumstances.

The kingdom of God is like a medium size church in a medium size town full of folks who have been baptized into the faith, they have promised in their confirmation vows to be diligent in the use of the means of grace until death, and when they’re thinking clearly, they believe with all of their hearts that they are the blessed and treasured people of God. They understand that the enemies of their faith are fierce, that the devil and his evil angels don’t fight fair, and that the Christian life here and now is a matter of daily drowning the old adam so that the new life in Christ might stand up and rule. Every once in awhile, in their life together, they have a new beginning. And as the months go on, they become more and more famous for this one thing, they become famous for confessing their faults and their failure to God and to one another. In Jesus’ Name.