**1/29/23**

**Royal Rumble and The Beatitudes**

**Matthew 5:1-12**

Yesterday was an interesting day for sure. It started with finishing up my notes and reports from my job for the week. Now, that might not be the most ideal thing to wake up for early on a Saturday morning. However, with that behind me I could focus on church work or kingdom work.

So, I got myself ready for the day and headed over to this very building with Heather to focus on our food pantry and its ministry. We were blessed to encounter several different people during the course of the day. We got to train and refine some of our skills while sharing and discussing the mission of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church’s Food Pantry. We got the opportunity to see the heart of Jesus in others as they worked, brought by donations, smiled, and talked about various things. We got to see Jesus at work in each of these individuals we encountered.

On the flip side of the coin, I happened to get several comments about the funky shirt I had on. My shirt was a mash up between the Simpsons and Wrestling Characters from the WWE. For those of you unaware, last night was the wrestling pay-per-view called the Royal Rumble. Fittingly, I realized that when I went home later in the day I would be wrestling with my thoughts, ideas, and feelings towards today’s Gospel Reading. I also knew that I would be wrestling with the thoughts, ideas, and feelings of others as I conducted my continued research in the effort of preparing this sermon. Ultimately, how there would be one winner that came out of the 30-person battle royal known as the Royal Rumble, there would arise one final product that I got to present to all of you today. Now by no means is this an exhaustive understanding of the Beatitudes we heard about, but it is my understanding mixed with those of others. So, please take from it what you wish, and feel free to continue your education and thought process just like I will.

With that said… Did anyone happen to hear the same Gospel Reading I heard today? Yes… I know I’m the one that read it after all… but still!!! I mean did we just really get a list of eight blessings?!?! Or… was it more like a list of eight curses?!?! I can honestly admit that I don’t know when I read and study things sometimes if I am supposed to think in an abstract manner, or just think and understand in a simple straight forward manner. I am sure many of you might even feel the very same way at times when you pick up your Bible, or when you sit in these very pews.

Over the years the Beatitudes have been something many of us have familiarized ourselves with. We have heard several Preachers discuss them in many of sermons. We have gotten several approaches to what they mean, how we are to take them, and how we are to use them in our continued growth as a Christian. So, as I said before, I am here to offer you yet another perspective today. Yes, some of you may have already heard or learned it before, and some of it may be presented in a different manner than you have ever heard before. You may also hear some things you may not align with, or want to put in your basket of understanding. I want to reassure you that is completely fine. As a matter of fact, that is the fun part of our faith isn’t it? It is individualistic, just like our shopping experience out in the stores or on-line. And, no matter how many times the Beatitudes come up it is great to take another look at them. It is great to continue to explore them in a manner that allows us to get yet another perspective to put in our respective arsenals.

So, let us set the scene here today. Jesus saw all of these people gathered around, and he realized he needed to get a bit of distance, or for what we might commonly know as some personal space. He also wanted to ensure he was heard by everyone that gathered, but he knew that he needed to ensure his disciples would especially hear him so they could go and do the work and share the Gospel. Jesus chose to make things a bit more intimate while holding his teaching session up on the mountain. Now, keep in mind he did not walk away from the crowds or exclude them in any manner. However, he really ensured his disciples had the front seat for these important concepts to be taken in. He knew that this teaching was extremely different, and he knew his disciples would really need to focus to grasp all that he was speaking about. Jesus knew that the crowds of folks were going to be like you and I, and have several questions or even be confused. Thank goodness he realized this, and he let the disciples have these temporary front seats to help us all out!

So, “Jesus spoke the Beatitudes to the disciples – people who already knew that the way to heaven is through faith in Jesus. That is important to remember because so many people think that the Beatitudes teach us how to be saved when they really illustrate how the saved are to be.” (2) Did you just happen to catch that last part?!?! Let me repeat it… “they really illustrate how the saved are to be.” (2) We are saved through faith and grace alone. However, we are called to set a continuous example for those that might not understand the heart and the mission of Jesus when he was here on earth. We are the living examples now, and how we act and love one another is the pure personification of living out these Beatitudes.

Now don’t go and confuse yourself more than I already confused myself while I was studying. Verses 10-12 are like one compound complex sentence where we focus on one topic a little more than the others. It does not make it any more important than the others. However, the explanation is gone through a bit more to ensure we catch the point. It is also reassuring us that this is really normal if you take on the call to be a Christian.

So, “If you count them up, there are 8 of these blessings. These aren’t describing 8 different types of Christians. Instead, these 8 blessings describe the ideal Christian. Of course, there was only one of those, Jesus. This advice for living sounds foolish to the world, but for we, who have seen what Jesus has done for us, and have seen through our eyes of faith the benefits Christ won for us, it makes perfect sense that we would want to live like him.” (3) Most importantly, they speak about how we are to humble ourselves. We are not called to act or react to the way that this world would typically want us to. So, these guide stones should be heeded with great attention, and we should model ourselves after them to the point that we might be called weird by those that do not understand our faith walk, and our heart. I mean after all, no one ever said living like and following Jesus was going to be easy, did they?

I want to provide you with some warning today as well. All too often we try and make what we read a measuring stick, or a set of rules that we should be bound to. Yes, we are to follow Jesus’ example. Yes, we are to model our lives after Jesus. However, we do not need to have our inner “Pharisee” come out. Because if we do, we might in fact “want to make the Beatitudes a legalistic set of requirements for us to enter the Kingdom of God. If a person could truly be all the things they describe, I guess that might work! But the fact is that because of our sin, we could never be poor enough, sad enough, meek enough, and persecuted enough to make up for all our sins.” (4)

“God wants us to empty ourselves of all the things that we have prided ourselves on. He wants us to take off those religious masks and the fake smiles and simply be ourselves with him. He knows our true spiritual condition much better than we do. He knows the secret, hidden sins of our hearts and minds. He knows the true motivation behind each of our actions—the selfishness, the greed, the ambition, the desire. He knows what we do when we think no one else is watching. None of this is news to him! He just wants us to acknowledge our pitiful condition before him—that our own righteousness just doesn’t have what it takes to “make the cut” in the kingdom of God.” (4)

“Jesus takes what the world calls “blessed” and turns it completely upside down. In the process, he gives special honor to those who are despised and hated by the world, and shows us all where true joy and happiness in life really comes from! Once we have been emptied of all our sinful pride and self-righteousness, we discover that God has always wanted to fill us with the good things that can come only through faith in Jesus Christ, our Savior, who is more than willing to forgive us, cleanse us, and make us new from within!” (4)

All of this sounds pretty cool, right?!?! However, we have to realize that we need to submit ourselves in a way that makes us vulnerable. That is not too easy for sure, but we are reminded that the reward is much higher than the price for relinquishing a pride that does not need to be held onto.

So, let us be reminded of this after all. “God doesn’t ask you to compare yourself with others. He asks you to compare yourself to him. And there we stand like the biggest fools in the world if we try to convince God that he’s just so lucky to have such swell Christians like us on his team. No, we need to mourn over our sins. “To mourn” doesn’t just mean to be sad. “Mourning” is closely associated with death. The reality is that your sins did cause someone to die. Someone very dear to you: your brother, Jesus. Yes, it was you and your actions that killed Christ. And if there is little mourning in the heart over the sins that brought about this innocent death, there can be little comfort in that heart. Blessed are those who mourn over sins, for they will be comforted. Being spiritually poor is good, mourning is good, because then and only then are we led to appreciate forgiveness. Then we see grace as not something that can be thrown around and played with and taken back whenever we feel the need, but we see grace and mercy as something we need constantly, even more often than we need oxygen.” (3)

Being the victor in the Royal Rumble of life has high costs and high consequences at times. We need to throw our old selves and concepts over the top rope to win the ultimate prize in the effort of coming into the kingdom. The Beatitudes “really illustrate how the saved are to be.” (2)

Amen.

**References**

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Sunday, January 29, 2023

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Contributed by Daryl Bahn on Nov 3, 2001

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12

Denomination: Lutheran

**Matthew 5:1-12**

Jesus opens the Sermon on the Mount by naming those who are blessed in the reign of God.

1When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down,

his disciples came to him. 2Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

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

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

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

 6“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be

filled.

 7“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

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

 9“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

 10“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is

the kingdom of heaven.

 11“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all

kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12Rejoice and be glad, for

your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the

prophets who were before you.”