



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. AMEN

Hard to believe that it was over 3 decades ago that I bought my first “for Dummies” book. I think it was called Computers for Dummies. You remember them, the big yellow books that could dummy down the core concepts in a non-threatening way. Wiley Publishing was really on to something at least as far as technology goes. But today their horizons have been broadened from auto repair to cognitive behavioral therapy, and from anti-inflammatory diets to podcasting, they have made intimidating subjects approachable, with less technical jargon and in an easy-to-follow format. Well, that is exactly what Jesus was hoping to do for us in this week’s Gospel lesson. In fact, some might liken his entire Sermon on the Mount as a collection of core concepts that all Christians need to understand.

The Beatitudes get their name from the Latin word, *beatitudo* which means a state of bliss or a feeling of supreme happiness. So, to be blessed means to be joyful, but here in our text it is oh so much more than that. It is not just a euphoric rush, but an existential state of serenity found only from being in harmony with the will of God. In these 8 or 9 statements Jesus tells us how to be in harmony with God’s Kingdom. Some might say that it is like Christianity for Dummies if you will. And wouldn’t it be nice to be able to learn and remember all the vastness of our beliefs in just a few statements that come to us right from the heart of Jesus. Jesus is telling us, just as he told his disciples in our Gospel lesson today, how to follow him and how to be a Christian, so go and do it. They point us to a different reality than we are accustomed too. They point us to what life is really like in the kingdom of God. They point us to an experience that in looking toward God we find blessings, rather than the temporary circumstances of the worldly moment.

Only from the perspective of God’s reign does it make any sense that the meek will inherit the earth and not the aggressor; that the poor in spirit will win God’s favor, not those that

are proud of heart and that those who mourn over the injustices in life will be comforted, not those who are content living as they do.

These Beatitudes turn the world, the human world, upside down. They are an awesome reminder that only when we rely on the Lord and make Him the center of our life, do we find true happiness, joy, and contentment. As I read this week it came to me that these Beatitudes and life are a lot like a box of chocolates. You never know what you are going to bite into, but you can be assured that it will be sweet and delicious.

So, this morning I would like to ask you a question. Are you blessed? Don't be too quick to answer. Think for a minute. You win the Supercash Lottery, like someone I know, and love and it puts you on top of the world. But then tax time comes, and you owe a pile of money to the government, even more than the IRS took out of your winnings in the first place. Then the rest gets spent and you have to go back to living normally. Soon the truck you bought needs some major repairs and the budget is tight. Or have you had a stroke of bad luck, like losing your job. I can relate to that one too. Real estate got really slow a few decades ago, where I was doing more counseling of people who owed more on their homes than they were worth, It was hard to make a living when prospective sellers could not list their homes with you as foreclosure was too near. But in that case, it led me to ministry. In fact, the ministry was what I was doing as I sat around many a kitchen table and cried and prayed with folks who wanted to sell their homes. And here I am today, with a true blessing as I found my true calling in life.

I read this parable this week to prove that point. A young man asked his father for a horse. All of his friends had horses and he wanted one, too. But his father said no. Feeling dejected, he went for a long walk out in the woods. Lo and behold, a beautiful mare appeared out of nowhere. She was strong and gentle and easy to ride. He rode her back to the village and told his father, "Look father! This horse came to me. What a blessing!" The father replied, "You never know, it could be a curse." Sure enough, the boy was riding his new horse with his friends when the horse shied and threw him to the ground, breaking his leg. The friends carried him back to the village, and he told his father, "You were right. It was a curse, after all." The father replied, "You never know, it could be a blessing." Sure enough, a neighboring tribe declared war on his village. Every able-bodied man was expected to fight. But because he had a broken leg, the boy was exempt. He told his father, "You were right; it was a blessing. The father said, "You never know, it could be a curse."

So, what is a blessing? I guess it depends on whether you look toward God or toward your human endeavors. Apart from God, what appears to be a blessing can be your undoing, and what appears to be misfortune can be a blessing in disguise. If you ever have the opportunity to read about the Apostle Paul, you will see clearly how hardship and blessing can go hand in hand. Paul was one to tell us that when the Lord reigns the proud are humbled, the foolish are seen to be wise, the weak are made to be strong. He truly believed that what it meant to be blessed was to know God and believe that He is the source of all your strength and hope. Just read a chapter or two of our favorite books of the Bible to study, Romans. Chapter 5 verses 3-5. "we boast in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and

hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

God gives us strength and hope when we live by faith. I have gone to see many a person in the hospital. It is amazing that no matter what put them there, a choice they made or an accident, you can see their faith in their outlook on life and their future. How often do we turn a curse into a blessing? Or even a blessing into a curse. Attitude is everything and life is so much better when you let your love of the Lord and His love for you control that emotion.

God will show us mercy in our lives by giving us what we need, not always what we want. Our abundant life comes from living in the footsteps of Jesus. All we need to do is have faith in our one true and loving God. We will be blessed beyond our wildest imagination. One quick aside here. Have you ever heard the statement that a man's two happiest days in life are the day he buys a boat and the day he sells it."

So, I ask you again, are you blessed? Tallying up the good fortunes you have had in your life and weighing them against the bad will not give you the answer. A better way to answer would be to base your answer on what Jesus said in the Beatitudes. So, let's listen to them in a more contemporary language of Eugene Peterson's paraphrase called the Message.

*You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you, there is more of God and his rule.*

*You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.*

*You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought.*

*You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink for the best meal you'll ever eat.*

*You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.*

*You're blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.*

*You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.*

*You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution.*

*The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.*

Let us pray. Good and gracious Father, we thank you for pouring out your blessings on us each and every day, not so that we can be rich and famous, but that we come to experience new life in your kingdom. Let us always be faithful to the purpose for which you have created and sustain us in our abundant lives, as we wait for the day to come when you will call us to be Saints in your heavenly realm. In your son's most holy name. AMEN