

Matthew 5:1-12

I think, most of you, if you weren't listening to country music growing up, or even if you were, I think most of you have likely heard the Mic Jagger song, "I Can't Get No Satisfaction". For some people it could be an anthem of their life; always looking for something more, always trying something new, never being satisfied. "But I try and I try and I try and I try..." never giving up.

What are most people in our society searching for? Peace? Prosperity? Success? Good health? Love? Maybe some people are even searching for the basics: food, clothing, a roof over their head. What are we as Christians, who for the most part having our basic needs met, what are we searching for? I think maybe some of the same... peace, prosperity, good health, success, and love.

In our gospel reading this morning Matthew is quoting Jesus speaking to a people who are searching for a calm spirit, a bit of power in their lives, maybe freedom... they were under the Roman rule, free to practice their religion because of a subservient agreement that had been made with the Romans. They were not required to worship the Roman king, who, even though he was simply a human, and a wicked one at that, believed he was aligned with the gods. In America we do not have to live under the kind of rule that was in force at that time. The words Jesus speaks are foreign to our way of life, attaching blessings to suffering doesn't seem to make sense. Some people feel as though they are living a life full of blessings because they have material goods: a good job, food on the table, a roof over their head... those types of things... and that's just what they are... things, not true blessings. They are gifts from God, because everything we have or are comes from God, and there's nothing wrong with having things unless having them, and the means of getting them, are more important than a relationship with God. All the blessings Jesus is speaking about come from having a relationship with God.

Why do we even want a relationship with God? For some people it is so that we know we will not spend eternity burning in the fires with the devil. For others, including myself, it is so that life in this world can be lived to its fullest, followed by an eternity with Jesus in the presence of God. I know I've said it before, but it's important enough to say again: the thing that has made the most influence in changing humanity for the good is the presence of Jesus on this earth. Jesus turned things around.

Yet, I believe there are some things on this list of blessings that we can relate to. Being poor in spirit may be one of them. I've always interpreted being poor in spirit as a bad thing, not having enough of a spiritual relationship with God. When I was researching for this sermon, I found something written by Billy Graham that changed my point of view. He said that, when going back to the original language being poor in spirit is better translated to something more like being humble. Doesn't that make more sense, those who are humble will inherit the kingdom of God? Being humble is the opposite of being self-satisfied and proud. So when we come to God we need to realize our sin and know that on our own we cannot find spiritual satisfaction.

Oh, and yes, we can relate to being the ones who mourn. We know grief, we know what it is like to lose someone we love. It's painful. It hits us at times we don't expect it to. We think we've gotten over it and all of a sudden, wham! We are blindsided and it starts over. Grief isn't something we get over. It's something we learn to live with. The comfort we know as Christians is knowing that one day we will be reunited. We have that hope in Jesus who conquered death.

Next we hear blessed are the meek... Meek and mild is something it seems no one wants to be known for because other people will trample all over you in today's society. But what if being meek meant that you have the power to do something but choose not to for the good of someone else? In the Old Testament we learn that King Saul was trying to kill David. David was hiding deep in the dark recesses of a cave. King Saul happened to choose that cave for some personal business; he was defenseless and David was armed. David could have ended King Saul's life right then and there but chose to do what was right and allow him to live. That is an example of meekness, choosing to do what is good for another person when you have the power or ability to elevate your own status. Something in today's world that demonstrates meekness would be to allow the person with a couple of items to go before you when you have a full cart of groceries. Or choosing not to buy inexpensive clothing that was made in a country known for sweatshops, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and The Philippines.

We are assured by these beatitudes that Jesus spoke during the sermon on the mount that he understands life is not easy. Jesus faces the difficulties. He lets us know that he knows life isn't always easy and by sticking to our Christian values and not wavering from them there will be a time when we will be blessed by all of it. As Paul says in the letter to the Corinthians, our second reading this morning, the way of the cross is foolish to those who don't believe. Verse 25 tells us that "God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."

What we need to remember is that we are all in this life together. Yes, it's nice to have material goods, it's nice to have everything we physically need, but when greed begins we forget that Jesus came to level the playing field, to bring us together as one body in Christ's church. We are the hands and feet of Jesus in this world, and we learn about our tasks by studying the gospels. When we do we will find that we are supposed to act differently than the way of the world. People will call us foolish, but we know that following Jesus, living in a way that reflects his priorities is exactly what brings us satisfaction. So we are to be humble and meek, we are to seek righteousness and justice, and show mercy, we are to allow ourselves to be comforted, we are to reject evil thoughts, we are to keep from causing an unwarranted argument, and we are to do all of this when it makes us look foolish to those in this world. Even though it may be hard to understand, living with this type of focus will bring us the blessing of satisfaction.

By the way, any of you who know the English language know that two negatives in a sentence give us a positive, so "I can't get no satisfaction" translates to "I can get satisfaction." That satisfaction comes from a life where we make serving God a priority. All glory be to God.