



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

This morning we have the Beatitudes as written by Luke. These are the blessings and woes that we would do well to listen closely too. Since I am still in the Epiphany mode, I felt a bit out of sorts with this lesson. Talking about being happy and being warned just didn't seem to fit with the revelation of Jesus bringing His light to the world.

Remember, we had the three kings who followed the star to find the babe in Bethlehem, where they gave him their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then we had the revelation of Jesus as God's Son, with whom He is well pleased coming out of the waters of baptism. Jesus then shows his divinity at a wedding in Cana where he turned water into wine. Then, He visited his hometown in our next two readings, where he spoke truth to those in Nazareth. His friends were amazed as they heard Him claim to be the one to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah. Jesus claimed to be the one sent from God to bring God's glory to all people. Last week, Jesus went fishing and not only drew in nets filled with fish, but three men, Simon, James, and John that would follow him and become his first disciples with reverence and amazement in their souls.

And here we are today with the Beatitudes. They are from the Sermon on the Plain, the teachings of Jesus telling us who is blessed and who better look out if they don't get in line. How does this fit in with the season of epiphany, the manifestation of our Lord? To me, this reading shows us that Jesus is here to proclaim the Kingdom of God and what it means to be a follower of Christ. It means that our lives will be turned upside-down. Amid our lives of turmoil, isolation, and distress, the promise of Christ is an astonishing contradiction. God has been made known to all who encounter Jesus. Through our participation, our believing in Jesus, we find meaning and hope. Remember the hymn, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and His righteousness".

Through this Epiphany season we are seeing God revealed in Jesus as He not only reveals himself to man, but as He makes his way to the cross. So again, what do we make of these blessings and woes?

Many theologians have spent years comparing the Sermon on the Mount Beatitudes in Matthew with the Sermon on the Plain Beatitudes in Luke, our lesson today. But I want us to look at the big picture instead of dissecting them. The idea of being blessed. And yes, folks we are extremely blessed by God Our Father.

Do you know what Best Buys Geek Squad is? They are people who come to your house to fix your computer or TV. I bet some of you have had them in your home, or wish you had. Our lives are so complicated that sometimes we need help figuring things out. Even our cars today have so much technology that we throw our hands in the air trying to figure out how to get the rear wipers on. We need a degree from MIT or to have a son that used to work for apple, to figure out all the buttons, apps, and do dads on our cell phones. Sometimes I wonder if we are really happier or blessed to have so much technology.

Have you ever heard someone refer to the KISS program? Keep it simple stupid or is it stupid simple. What they mean is to keep things simple so we can understand and figure out what really makes us happy or feel blessed in life. Our Gospel lesson for today is not only about being blessed but how life can be simple. If you feel blessed you will feel closer to God, right? For he is the source of our happiness and blessings.

A quick story. Once upon a time, a young girl watched her grandpa feed the birds. Her grandfather had made several hanging feeders from birch logs. There were small logs that had drilled shallow holes in them, about the width of your thumb. Grandpa made this special concoction of lard, peanut butter, and birdseed. He kept it in his refrigerator. He used a table knife to fill all the holes in the logs with this homemade suet.

The birds loved it! They almost attacked the feeders after they found they were full. So, when grandpa noticed that they were empty, he would go again and again to fill them up. The little girl noticed that the birds all flew away when grandpa went out to refill the holes in the logs. This went on for most of the summer.

But then something changed and one day the birds seemed to figure out that Grandpa was the one who was filling the bird feeders. He was the source of the delightful food they enjoyed. He was the source of the suet if you will. And now, when grandpa came outside to fill the feeders, the birds flew around his head in joy! Grandpa was the source of their blessing!

So, if you are not happy and feeling blessed, draw closer to God, who is the only source of genuine blessings. You can be only blessed in God. And only then can you be truly happy.

Another shorter question story! If you have a beautiful goldfish that you love and take it out of the water to sing it a love song, will it be happy? NO If you put the fish on the couch and turn on the TV for it, even watching the "Little Mermaid", will it be happy? NO, But if you put the fish back in the water, will it be happy? YES

Folks it is the same with us. If we want to be blessed, we need to be with God. God is love, total love. He is here today; always and forever. God loves you even if you have not yet discovered the love of God for you. God sent his only son to earth to die for our sins and rise again to give us the promise of eternal life over death. What greater love is there than that?

When we turn our hearts to Jesus, we don't need all the buttons to push. There is only one, the cross. That is where He has nailed all the things that can come between us and Him. And that is where He waits for us.

Our lesson on Wednesday this week in confirmation was The Cross. The cross, to the Romans, meant a place to crucify criminals. It was a symbol of shameful death. Placed high on a hill to scare

the people into submission, it is where suffering went on for those who broke the law. Today after Jesus broke the stigma by coming alive again after death, the cross is a symbol of that act. Jesus died and rose again so defy death so we will not have to worry about our futures. I drew on a piece of paper for Lauren, two sides of a deep riverbank. Then, I placed a cross across from one bank to another. Jesus bridged the gap between man and God. Between human reality and the Kingdom of God. So, when you wear your crosses around your neck or in the holes in your ears or see one in a church, remember that Jesus gave man the opportunity to easily get to God.

Jesus words today were simple when he said, "Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." If you were sad, Jesus was telling you that in His Kingdom things would be different. In God's Kingdom there is laughter.

Jesus also gave hope to people who were poor, those who were hungry, and those who were disliked because they followed Him. These Beatitudes and woes we read today are descriptive rather than prescriptive. They describe already-established reality instead of calling us to new behavior calculated to garner blessings and avoid woes. Just cross the bridge to The Kingdom, as it will turn your life around. Take time to uncomplicate your life. Feed the birds. Then, take time to sit with God, read his Word, and have a conversation with him in prayer. It is simple, and the rewards are great. God has blessings for you each day, more than you will ever know. So, "Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven." AMEN