

Text: Mathew 5:1-12  
Date: Sunday, October 08, 2006 (Thanksgiving Sunday)  
Location: Zion Lutheran Church- North Battleford, SK.  
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1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach 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 be shown mercy.

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

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

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.  
12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. [Matthew 5:1-12 NIV]

Grace and Peace be unto you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We have come here today to hear God's word proclaimed. We have gathered to hear the gospel of our Lord- the good news if you will.

Well, where is the good news? The way in which I read this Gospel passage today, there isn't much good news here for us. According to Christ, If you have money- forget it. If you have enough to eat- forget it. If you are happy at this point in your life- forget it. If you have ever denied the requests of a panhandler- forget it. The kingdom of God is not yours.

This is not good news for me, and I bet that this is not good news for you. After all, I am willing to guess that most of us drove here today, that most of us had breakfast this morning, and that most of us will go to bed tonight with a roof over our heads. Thus, these words of Christ do not bode well for us at all.

But now, let us imagine that we are not at Zion Lutheran Church- North Battleford, SK. But rather we are members of Zion Lutheran Church of Ethiopia. We live in straw huts, we hope and pray for clean drinking water, and disease has riddled our village. And now, we too, have come to church on this Sunday morning to hear the Gospel proclaimed.

Now let's continue this thought. Close your eyes if you wish. Now listening as an Ethiopian, hear the words of our savior: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh."

Now this most definitely sounds like great hope-filled news to my impoverished Ethiopian ears. Now, isn't that interesting. Just by simply changing the circumstances of our experiences and life outlook- radically changes how we

hear and interpret Christ's words.

Here, as we sit as members of one of the richest nations on earth, Christ's words make us squirm and feel uncomfortable. We feel uneasy about them because we know that we haven't lived up to them. We are the rich ones, we are the full ones, and we are the laughing ones.

But on the other hand, when we changed our life situation and considered the needs of those in Ethiopia, Christ's words became affirming and hope filled. In other words, Christ's sermon was not law, but rather it was hope filled gospel.

This dichotomy is important for us to recognize. Because it works to remind us that the gospel is in fact a very personal message. How you hear the gospel and how you respond to it depends upon you and your relationship with the world and with God. What is good news for some, is inevitably bad news for others.

So what is our good news. Where is our gospel? Where is our hope? Our hope is in faith. Because for those of us who do not measure up. For those of us that do have enough to eat. For those of us who do have shelter. For those of us who have failed to meet the need of every pan-handler. Our good news is the fact that we recognize our short comings and sins.

We can not pretend that we have answered and met everyone of these commands. For we have most certainly not. We, who are sinners, like all of the saints before us, are justified by our faith in the grace and love of God.

That is our good news. Our gospel is the fact that we recognize that we can not do it on our own. If these commands of Christ make you feel uncomfortable, like they do me, then that is a good thing. Its means we know that we need the mercy and forgiveness of God.

That is what is at the heart of the Gospel for us. And it is also the way that Luther thought the Gospel should be heard. Luther in his wisdom, realized that there can be no gospel without law. Simply to proclaim to someone that they are saved is meaningless unless they first understand what they are being saved from.

It would be like a doctor telling a patient she was cured without first telling her she was sick to begin with.

In this case, these commands work to remind us of our short comings and sins. In hearing these words of Christ we realize that we haven't always turned the other cheek, and we haven't always offered our coat to those who would steal our shirt. In hearing these words, our failures become quite evident.

But, fortunately, for us as people of faith it does not end there. Because while we may be condemned by these words, we are freed in faith by the good news of the resurrection.

And once again, it's a personal message. Because the same words that trouble and distress me, might liberate and free you.

When I was young, and had just started university I was full of energy. In fact, I wanted to share the gospel with everyone. So I joined a local campus evangelical group.

Now the purpose of this group was to find people on campus and to share the "gospel" with them. At first, I thought this was great because that is what I wanted to do.

But before they would let me loose on the campus with the gospel, they first trained me how to properly share it.

The training went something like this: Walk around the university campus looking for someone all by themselves who looks lonely and depressed. I guess they felt that these people made good candidates. Next approach this person and ask them a series of questions like "Are you happy with your life?" or "Would you like the power to change your life?" ect.

Next, after you have convinced them that you hold the secret power to their happiness, you tell them that they are sinners and that Jesus loves them and if they pray and ask for forgiveness they will be saved.

Well, I took these teachings with me and went out about the campus to look for new sheep to bring into God's fold. Well, throughout the course of the first month I must have talked to over twenty people. And do you know how many remotely cared about what I was saying- (you guessed it- none).

Discouraged, I went and talked to my local Lutheran chaplain- whom (looking back) I probably should of talked to in the

first place.

And the words he told me I will never forget. He said to me, "Sheldon, do you like it when businesses send you form letters telling you how much they appreciate you.?" I responded, "No". Then he replied to me, "Then don't treat the gospel like a form letter."

That was it. That is what I needed to hear. I was assuming that everyone was hearing the same message as me. I didn't realize that the meaning of the gospel could be different for a person from Ethiopia from that of a person from Canada.

And to be quite honest, I don't know how you have heard the gospel proclaimed today. I don't know if it made you feel uncomfortable or if it lifted your hearts and gave you inspiration.

But what I do know, is that through the gift of faith God loves everyone of us. And I hope and pray that everyone will leave hear today confident that they are justified and loved by God.

Amen