

## Who Are the Poor in Spirit?

Matthew 5:1-12

All Saints Day (Observed) November 5, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There are those who pay attention to only part of the law. Usually such people who pay attention to only part of the law pay attention to the part of the law that they think they can keep. When they pay attention to this part of the law there are parts of the law to which they do not pay attention. Usually these are the parts of the law that they are not keeping.

They may pay attention to tithing or to proper giving. They may pay attention to religious traditions involving how they dress or rules about keeping the worship day. They do this because they think they can keep this part of the law. When they keep this part of the law they think that they are righteous in the sight of God. But they are not keeping all of the law. They may be neglecting weightier portions of the law like justice and mercy and faithfulness. They are not righteous in the sight of God, but they think that they are.

These people are not poor in spirit. They appear righteous and because they appear righteous in their own eyes, they are not poor in spirit. They would never dream to stoop so low as to become poor in spirit. They are the very opposite, but only on the outside. They appear righteous but inside they are filled with sin and death.

They are not poor in spirit.

Such people will use their own external righteousness to condemn others. Since they have kept part of the law, they condemn other people who do not keep the same parts of the law that they have kept. They ignore that such people sometimes keep the parts of the law that they do not keep. They are quite willing to try to pull a speck out of their brother's eye, all the while not noticing the log that is in their own eye.

These people are not poor in spirit.

So who are the poor in spirit?

There was a man who had a wasting disease. It ate away at his flesh and skin. It permanently disfigured him. It was not long in the progress of his disease that he began to live reclusively. He did not like going in public and enduring the looks of surprise and sometimes horror on other people's faces. Eventually he did not even see his family that much. The doctors and specialists could not cure him. He had only Jesus upon which to rely.

This man is poor in spirit.

There was a man who served a long time in the nation's military. He had commanded troops in the field while he was in the field with them. He had commanded men to their deaths. He had retrieved their mangled bodies for the return home for proper burial. He had watched men die.

This man had never attended divine service. He had never gone to public worship in his life. He had only heard the reports about Jesus. Other people in the military and even civilians that he had encountered had told him about the Christ and about how the Christ healed people. As a man who had frequent and unforgettable encounters with death and near misses with his own life, he found the Christ's healing power to be compelling.

It came to pass that a man under his command was ill. The illness was growing worse and the doctors were not forthcoming with help. Even though this was not a military situation, the man had grown so tired of death that he prayed to Jesus for healing for the man under his command.

This man is poor in spirit.

There was an outcast woman. At least she was outcast as far as religious people were concerned. It was not that religious people were deliberately mean to her. It was simply that their interests and her interests rarely intersected. Like the man from the military, she too had never been to Divine Service. She had never attended public worship. But like the man from the military she too had heard about the Christ and His capacity to heal. And when her daughter was ill, she knew that there was no reason why the Christ should listen to her. She had never gone to Divine Service. She did not involve herself in the affairs of religious people or religious things. In spite of the fact that she could have tried to assert her righteousness before God claiming that she was spiritual, but not religious, she knew that would be a lie. However, her daughter was ill and she needed to do something about it. The girl's father was no help. So even though she was not religious nor had she ever been to Divine Service, she prayed to Jesus for her little girl's healing.

This woman is poor in spirit.

There was a man who had attended Divine Service all of his life. He was eventually diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. The disease slowly over time took away his mobility until finally he was left paralyzed. While his disease made its progress his friends brought him to Divine Service. He participated in the public worship of God for as long as he was able. Eventually even that proved to be an impossibility.

This man had attended Divine Service long enough to know that his disease was not necessarily the result of any particular sin or group of sins that he had committed in his life. At the same time he understood that the brokenness of the creation was part and parcel of the curse that God had laid on the creation as result of the sin of humanity. Since humanity is living outside of fellowship with the giver of life, humanity slowly withers and perishes. He knew that it was his sins and the sins of all people that had put him into the situation which he now faced. He was permanently paralyzed.

He prayed to God. He prayed to God for healing to be sure, but more than that, He prayed for forgiveness.

This man is poor in spirit.

There was a couple who lost their twelve year old girl. She did not die in a dramatic fashion. There was no accident. She simply got sick and died. The doctors could not come in time to save her. Her parents were unable to do anything.

They had attended Divine Service all of their lives. They knew that all death was a result of human sin and the separation of the fellowship between God and humanity. They prayed for the reconciliation of God and humanity. But more than that the Divine Service had taught them that Jesus raises the dead. And so for the rest of their lives they counted on the return of Jesus. They counted on His coming. They knew they had no other hope than the One who rose from the dead and raised the dead. They prayed for Jesus to come and raise their little girl from the dead.

This mother and this father are poor in spirit.

But it does not have to be a dramatic thing to be poor in spirit. You do not have to undergo some measure special of suffering as some of the people that I have just described in order to be poor in spirit. You do not have to have served in the military or suffered from tragic illness or loss to be poor in spirit.

There was a woman who suffered from an ordinary fever. She had a cold or the flu. She had failed to take her medicine in time. Her only hope of healing was Jesus. She too was poor in spirit.

There are some people who think about death a lot. They draw pictures of death. They spend a lot of time in cemeteries. They spend a lot of time around the things which cause death, both fire and water and other things. They spend a lot of time thinking about their own death.

Modernity has provided us with medical explanations for why some people suffer in this way. But modern explanations do not rule out the demonic. Just because some of the symptoms of the demon possessed in the New Testament can be explained in modern scientific terms does not mean that the demonic were not involved or that demons were not oppressing the individual. If indeed all of our illness are brought upon ourselves by our submission to the devil and his temptations in the shape of our sin manifesting itself in our sins, then the same is true of mental illness.

Some of these people even spend time contemplating taking their own life. They form plans on how they may kill themselves. Some of them have attempted to do so. Some of them have attempted to do so on more than one occasion.

Such people oppressed by demons have no recourse except to the One who casts out demons. Such people are poor in spirit.

There are people who attend the Divine Service. In the Divine Service they confess their faith in Jesus. They stand with the rest of the congregation and say, "I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord..." And they say all of the rest. At times they even take pride in their confession of faith. It is moving to them to say the creed especially in today's day and age with the government encroaching on religious freedoms and the general secularism of our day.

Then these same people go out and face a situation in their daily life where it is obvious that God is calling on them to bear witness to their faith in Him. It is apparent that at that moment they should have spoke up about faith in Jesus Christ. They should have stood their ground for what is right and stood against the evil of the day, but they did not.

They chickened out. They had that feeling rise in their chest as they prepared to say something about Jesus, but then they suppressed that feeling and did not say anything about Jesus. When the moment passed they were ashamed. They remembered how proud they were of their confession of Jesus in the Divine Service. They remember the times that they did stand up for him. And they also know that the only reason that they did not stand up for Jesus in this most recent incident in their life is because they were afraid. They were afraid of what people would say or think if they spoke up about faith in Jesus. They wanted the other people to like them. They were afraid to lose their friends if they stood up for what is right.

They had been to the Divine Service! They had heard Jesus! They knew that He had said, "Anyone who acknowledges Me before men, I also will acknowledge before My Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies Me before men, I also will deny before My Father who is in heaven." They knew that they had denied their Lord. They knew that He would deny them. They weep over their cowardice and hypocrisy.

These are the poor in spirit.

There are members of Christian congregations whom the Lord rebukes for their pride. They think that they are pretty good members of the congregation. They compare themselves to others and they

think that they are doing better than other members of the congregation. Sometimes they even admit that they think such things to others. They want some power or influence in the congregation. They want some favor with Jesus.

But Jesus rebukes them. He corrects them. He corrects them in His Word by telling them that the faith of children are more precious to him than the faith of the accomplished. But if the faith of children are more precious to Him than the faith of the accomplished that leaves no basis for anyone to think that they are the greatest.

Such people are ashamed of their pride. They stand rebuked before Jesus. Such people are poor in spirit.

These are a sample of those who are poor in spirit. This is not all who are poor in spirit. There are those who confess their sins and their sinfulness. There are adulterers and fornicators among them. There are liars and cheats among them. There are the politically zealous among them. They are all poor in spirit.

They are also the ones who grieve.

They are the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

They are the meek.

They are the pure in heart.

They are the merciful.

They are the peacemakers.

And if conditions are right, they are the ones who are persecuted for righteousness' sake.

They are blessed because theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.