

Surprise!

Matthew 5:1-12

All Saints Sunday, November 6, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Those who are poor in spirit are those whose spirits are poor. They are those who have sinned. They are those who have disobeyed their parents or committed adultery. They are those who have murdered or hated. They are those who have lied or cheated or coveted. They are those who have taken the Lord's name on their lips for vain purpose. They are the ones who have not feared, loved, or trusted in God above all things. How do you think they came to be poor in spirit?

If they had not been these things, they would not have been poor in spirit. They would have been rich in spirit. Those who are rich in spirit are rich in the things of the spirit. They are righteous. They fear God. They love God. They take the Lord's name on their lips in prayer and praise. The poor in spirit are the ones who love their neighbor and seek his good. They obey and honor their parents. The rich in spirit are the ones who are content with what God has given to them. They are honest and never lie. They never steal or cheat. They are rich in spirit because they have done these things.

Now here is the surprise. The kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor in spirit.

There are people who are comforted in the face of death. They have some philosophy with which they face death. They use that philosophy with good measure. They are able to deal with those who grieve and with their own grief. They have it all figured out. There are those who are comforted in the face of death because they never acknowledge the depths of death. They deny how much death takes away. They ignore how painful death really is. Their goal is not to grieve. Their goal is to face death with a smile on their face and warmth in their heart.

The surprise is that these people will not be comforted. How could they be comforted, they have already filled their heart with their own comfort. They have no reason to be comforted.

Then there are those people who are helpless in the face of death. They do not have it all figured out. They have precious few answers when it comes to death. They do not understand death. They do not see a purpose in it. They see in it only pain. They do not have a philosophy worked out on how to deal with death. They know it is coming, but they are not equipped for it when it comes to them. In other words, they know that their parents will die or that it is possible that their children will die, but when it happens, they are still unprepared. They are unprepared for the onslaught of what they are facing. Their ideas and notions about death pale in comparison to what the reality really is. When death strikes they are left thinking to themselves, "What do I do? How shall I handle this?"

Once facing the death of others unprepared they realize how little prepared they are to face their own death. They know that they have no resources to avoid it. They are miserable headed toward a fate over which they have no control.

Now here is the surprise. It is those who grieve who will be comforted. Those who have everything figured out cannot be comforted. Only those who grieve will be comforted for God raises the dead.

There are people who have power on the earth. There are people who command mighty armies. Even today there are those who have power on the earth. They have power to command giant military machines and the power to put countless thousands to death. There are people today who command nuclear arsenals who could wipe out all life on this planet. They have the power to do it. There are people

who are bold and able to lead others. They assert their leadership because they have a plan to lead others into better and more prosperous futures. They are successful and not just by the world's standards. They are frequently wealthy although not necessarily so. They are frequently well known in their own communities, but not necessarily so. They are bold whoever they are. They get things done.

They are not the meek. They are not the gentle. They are not those who notice others who are not able to do for themselves. They are not ones to reward people for work not done. They are not ones to give in to others.

The meek are. The meek do not lead. The meek do not take over. The meek do not seek after bold solutions.

And here is the surprise. The meek will inherit the earth. They will inherit the earth because the bold cannot inherit the earth. The bold have already taken it by might. Therefore only the meek will inherit it for God is God of the meek. The bold do not need Him.

There are those who do not hunger and thirst for righteousness. They do not hunger and thirst for righteousness because they already have it. They are the ones who are like those who are not poor in spirit. They have everything of the spirit. They have the righteousness that they need. They fear and love God. They love their neighbor as themselves. They are not satisfied because they are already satisfied.

The ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness would love to be righteous if only they could attain it. They would love to be holy if only they could get there. They would long to be free from their fear and love of things other than God. They would love to be free of their misuse of His name. They would love to be free from their drunkenness and the defilement of their bodies by various means. They would love to be free of their covetousness and all of their desires. They would love to be righteous, but they are not. They long for righteousness, but they have none.

And here is the surprise those who have righteousness will not be satisfied because it is already theirs. Only those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied because only they can be satisfied.

There are those who show mercy. And why not? Their righteousness has been filled. They will inherit the earth. They will be comforted. They will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Why not be merciful?

There are those who are not merciful. They keep track of righteousness. They keep track of their own and they keep track of others. They keep track of the good that others have done and reward them and they keep track of the bad that others have done and they punish them. They are not merciful. They keep careful track of everything and reward everyone accordingly. They expect that their own righteousness will be rewarded as well, but they are not merciful. And they will receive what they are looking for. They will get the just reward for their righteousness, but they will not receive mercy.

The surprise is that those who are merciful are the same people as those who are poor in spirit and those who grieve and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and when they stand in the judgment they will receive mercy.

There are those who are pure in heart.

I would hope by now that honesty is apparent in all of the people that our Lord has been discussing. Those who are poor in spirit know that they are poor in spirit. They do not deceive themselves into believing that they are not poor in spirit when they really are. And because they do not deceive themselves in regard to their poverty of spirit, they are pure in heart.

Those who grieve are honest about their grief. They know that they have no plan for addressing their grief. They are unprepared to face death either of their own or someone else's. They do not lie about their grief and pretend that everything is ok when it isn't. They are pure in heart.

The ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness are honest about the fact that they hunger and thirst for righteousness. They do not pretend to be satisfied already. They are not satisfied and they acknowledge it. They are pure in heart.

The pure in heart then, not surprisingly see God.

The ones who are pure in heart make peace.

They make peace because they cannot help but make peace. They are pure in heart! They are therefore at peace with themselves. They promote peace because they are looking for purity of heart in others. They are honest and therefore they are honest with others. Honesty makes for peace.

Dishonesty allows us to hold back the truth. It allows us to hold on to the grudge. It hides what the real issue is so that the real issue is never dealt with. As long as the real issue is never dealt with, the person withholding the truth can maintain his position of hatred or anger or distrust. They don't want to trust and so they are not honest and there is no peace.

The pure in heart make for peace and they can hardly help themselves. They live at peace. Their conscience is at peace and they are at peace with others.

The peace makers, not surprisingly, will be called the sons of God.

And when all of these things are true about anyone, that person is persecuted.

The person does not know how he will be persecuted. He only knows that he will be persecuted. He may be subject to death, but there are other forms of persecution besides death. There is torture. There is eviction. There is the loss of his rights in the society in which he lives. There is the realization that such people are the minority. There is the pilgrimage that they live on earth. There is ridicule for believing in the Savior who rose from the dead and raises the dead. There is scorn for believing in a savior who was crucified.

The persecution that our Lord predicts is that people will say every evil against you. They will accuse of hatred though you love. They will accuse of ignorance though you are wise. They will accuse of strangling the public good even though you seek it with all of your heart. There will be others who believe them when they accuse such people of such thing.

Your Lord has given you the instructions on what you are to do when persecution comes. He commands you to rejoice and to be glad. Then he gives you the reason why. That is how the prophets who were before you were persecuted. Such persecution marks you as in the same company with the prophets of old. And that is a glorious company to which anyone may belong.

To the prophets belongs the Kingdom of God. And so it is no surprise that when you are treated like the prophets, even though you may be poor in spirit, the Kingdom of God is yours.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.