

The 4th Sunday After Epiphany :Holy Trinity Church: January 29, 2023

It is our pride that kills our, soul!

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN!

Some years ago, I read an article in the newspaper titled, “How Do You Measure up as a man? So, I thought, how about the Ladies? Ladies, how do you measure up as a woman? The article stated that some extensive research had been conducted on the 20th century standards for measuring a man and a woman. The criteria were quite of interest and I thought that I might list them for the men and women here this morning just to see how they both measure up. The following are 8 principles for the measure of a person. Looking at these principles, they look to me like the Beatitudes we just heard in the Gospel. “just saying.”

- 1. Their ability to make and conserve money.**
- 2. The cost, style and age of their car.**
- 3. This is my favorite. How much hair they have? That's a sore spot for me.**
- 4. Their strength and size.**
- 5. The job they hold and how successful they are at it.**
- 6. What sports they like.**
- 7. How many clubs they belong to.**
- 8. How about their aggressiveness and reliability?**

My sisters and brothers, Jesus is sitting down proclaiming eight principles for the measure of a person. Their standards stand in stark contrast to the aforementioned. There would appear to be a wide gulf between the popular image of the successful person and what God sees as the successful person.

Here's what happened: Today we are into the Gospel of Matthew 5: 1-12. Last week, Jesus had just started his ministry and was gaining in popularity. Large crowds were gathering. He had just picked out his disciples. And in the quiet rolling grassy hills of northern Israel by the Sea of Galilee, Jesus delivered a sermon to a multitude. Acres and acres of human faces. The crowd represented a cross section of humanity. There were thousands of men,

women, and children. There were rich and poor, young and old, doubtless varied races, those who were astute business people and those who were failures. In fact, the crowd that Jesus spoke to that day represented the world in miniature. Yet, as different as they all were, Jesus understood that they were all on the same quest. They were all after the same thing. They all wanted happiness. Well, they are just like us, aren't we? Isn't that what we want for ourselves. Isn't that what we ultimately want for our children: Happiness. The problem is that we really don't grasp the true nature of happiness, and because of that it so often seems to elude us. You see, we think that happiness deals with our outer circumstances. We think that the truly happy man and woman is one who has achieved outer success. Thus ,our beatitudes read:

1. Blessed is the man and woman who makes a fortune.
2. Blessed is the man and woman who earns six figures.
3. Happy is the man and woman who has a palace in the city and a summer home in the mountains.
4. Blessed is the man and the woman who has won the applause of their peers.
5. Blessed is the man and the woman who is recognized as the darlings of society.

But on this special day, Jesus shared with his disciples and, indeed, with all of history, that this concept of happiness is a foundation built on sand.

Happiness is not at all based upon what we have. True happiness is based upon who we are. Happiness is not based upon the kind of house that we live in; it depends on the kind of people who live in the house. It is not the kind of clothes that we wear, but the person wears the clothes.

It is important to understand that Jesus did not give the Beatitudes, a word meaning blessed or happy, to the CROWD. The Gospel very clearly states:

“And seeing the multitude, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his DISCIPLES came to him. And he began to teach THEM.” Indeed, the Sermon on the Mount has been described by some as the Disciples ordination service.

So, why did Jesus do that? Why didn't he just give the beatitudes to the crowd and let them come to their own conclusions. For the simple reason that we must know Jesus the Christ as Savior before we know him as Teacher. Unless we have a relationship with God, the Beatitudes will seem most ludicrous.

They fly in the face of everything that the world has taught us. The problem so often is that we put the cart before the horse. We study his teaching and hope that they will change us. The fact is that it is Christ who changes us.

And, as we are changed, we adhere to his teachings. Thus, the Sermon on the Mount is the pattern of living for those who have received Jesus the Christ as Savior.

So, last week, I thought I would like to focus on two standards of living as set forth by Jesus, which we call today the Beatitudes.

- 1. Jesus began by saying: Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven. What does Jesus mean by poor in spirit? Luke states Jesus' words somewhat different than Matthew. He states the beatitude: Blessed are you poor. So, we are presented with a problem. Those who have wealth can say: Jesus is not talking about money he is talking about spiritual poverty. Those who are poor can say that he was indeed speaking of financial poverty. Thus, the rich thank God for Matthew and the poor thank God for Luke. Both can say: He blessed me. So then, who is correct?**

Chances my brothers and sister, are, neither one. For it is exactly this attitude of self- praise and self- justification that robs a person of their need for the Kingdom of God. When one says: I don't need to be poor in things because I am poor in spirit, and another says I don't need to be poor in spirit because I

am poor in things, both are saying in unison: I don't need. And we can never receive a Savior unless we first stand in need of a Savior.

A STORY, the story of the Pharisee and the Publican illustrates this. The story does not say that the Pharisee was rich. Indeed, since his prayer was: I thank you God that I am not an extortioner like other men and women, we might assume that he or she was not a wealthy person, because in those days' extortion was about the only way that one could amass wealth. Nor does the story say that the publican who prayed that day was poor. Indeed, if he or she was like many Publicans of his day, they very likely was wealthy. At any rate, the point of the story was that regardless of their outer circumstances, the Pharisee expressed an inner need for nothing. The publican admitted being a sinner and needed God's mercy. Each received what he felt he needed.

It is true, that is easier for a poor man or woman to recognize that they have need than a rich man. But it is neither wealth nor poverty that keeps a person out of the Kingdom of God.

It is pride. It is our pride my brothers and sisters in Christ, it is our pride that kills our, soul. Jesus is saying to us that the first step to personal happiness, the first step in our pilgrimage in coming to God, is to get rid of our pride.

Pride is the root of all sin. Blessed are the poor in spirit means that we must decrease, so that Jesus Christ might increase.

In Copenhagen, Denmark there is an unusual statue of Jesus Christ. After the bronze had been cast to that statue something happened. Because of either temperature or poor casting, the head of the statue bent forward. Yet, the decision of the church was to leave it that way, the idea being that if one chooses to look into the face of Jesus, he must first be on his knees. That is what being poor in spirit is all about.

My sisters and brothers in Christ, as much as is possible, pride must first be vanquished from the heart. Poverty of spirit must be placed within us. When we have done this, we are ready to take the second step into the Kingdom: Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Again, in the eyes of the world, this seems most ridiculous. We usually handle those who mourn by avoiding them. Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone. Isn't that how it goes. We handle those who mourn by attempting to get them out of their mourning state to cheer them up. Yet, here is Jesus saying: Blessed are those who mourn. Doesn't this simply perpetuate the stereotype of religion as being droopy eyed and sad faced?

A mourner in this sense, however, is not necessarily one who weeps, but one who shows concern, or who maintains a spiritual sensitivity. To be a candidate for the Kingdom one must be genuinely grieved about the way things are. The person who glibly says: “Oh sure, I agree, the world really is in a mess,” is not expressing a genuine grief but a resignation.

Our problem is that we want victory without suffering. We want cheap grace. We want the promised land , but we would much prefer to avoid the wilderness. We want the resurrection, but we would prefer to avoid Calvary. We want God’s blessing, but we want it without his purging and purifying our lives.

The purpose here is not to turn the world into a world of dark gloom, but rather to point out that if we avoid suffering and grief, then we can never be truly sensitive. Some years ago, I lost my father. This was the first real close family loss I had ever experienced, and I don’t mind saying that it hit me hard. To this day I still think of him every day and I mourn him. But the truth is that because I experienced that sorrow in my life, I can more effectively minister as a priest to those who are in sorrow. Perhaps before those events I did not fully understand, but now I truly know how people feel when I go to minister to them about the loss of their loved ones. Blessed are those who

mourn, for they have the potential of being more sensitive, more open to God, more caring individuals.

Here is the challenge on this 4th Sunday after Epiphany in late January. So, what about you? What losses have made you more sensitive? Blessed are those who mourn for the children of broken homes. Blessed are those who mourn for our fractured nation. Blessed are those who mourn for our cities and their plight. Blessed are those who mourn for our ignorance, despite our institutions of higher learning. Blessed are those who mourn for our school children, their teachers, and the parents praying that their child is coming home safely from school. Blessed are those who mourn for those who have hardened their hearts to sin. Blessed are those who mourn for our churches that have yet to deal with the issues of pedophilia priests and ministers that plague our growth.

Think about this my sisters and brothers in Jesus the Christ. For if we mourn, there is still hope for us. It shows that you care about something that is beyond yourself. In the end, it is not the mourners who are to be pitied, but rather those who do not mourn. Those who look at suffering humanity and who are not moved to compassion to the point of weeping need Jesus the

Christ as their savior. Then they will comprehend his teaching, “Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted. AMEN!