

Devotions - August 5-11, 2007
by Susan Anderson
Sharon Lutheran, Bessemer

Sunday, August 5

The Beatitudes: Mt. 5: 1-8

Jesus begins his ministry with a tour of Galilee, healing many from their physical ailments and exorcising evil spirits. He becomes famous, like Billy Graham, and crowds gather to hear his teaching recorded in the sermon on the mount. What are the people expecting? Likely, more dramatic recoveries.

How, then, does he begin? He begins with blessings and promises. The promises are wild, fantastic, incredible, more amazing than his healings. He promises the kingdom of heaven, inheriting the earth, seeing God, among others. Even more surprising are those to whom He makes the promises, the poor in spirit, the meek, the pure in heart.

Jesus makes these promises this day to us; today He blesses us just as He did those sitting on the hillside years ago. Is this what we are expecting?

Jesus, open our hearts to your blessings and promises. Amen.

Monday, August 6

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Mt. 5:3

"Poor in spirit" is the inevitable frame of mind of those without enough resources for food, shelter, clothing, and health care. Poverty and Piety go so well together because the poor have no other recourse than their hope in God.

As a home visitor for a school district, my purpose was to aid communication between school staff and families. Sitting on the offered straight chair (my hostess knowing we'd been trained not to use upholstered pieces for fear of bugs), this mother's face glowed with beauty as she told me about the joys she expected in heaven while 4 kids under 5 ran screaming about in various stages of undress at 11 in the morning in a room littered with clothing, baskets of stuff, and debris. She was half my age (22) with half the teeth (11). She knew that her hope and her future depended entirely on God.

Like her, we too have setbacks: a difficult job, the death of a loved one, a health care crisis, betrayal by a friend, and others you can name. On the days we cannot control what happens to us, we, like her, are poor in spirit. Then, recognizing our total dependence on God, we are blest by God's presence, experiencing the kingdom of heaven in the midst of our poverty.

Jesus, thank you for offering us the kingdom of heaven, a daily walk through Life's journey with You. Amen.

Tuesday, August 7

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Mt. 5:4

This blessing is so true when a child moves to a distant place, when a friend moves away, or when we make that final committal of a loved one to the Lord. God gives us those who share our sorrow. God gives us the promise of eternal life.

This blessing also applies to our ordinary days, to our human condition as sinners with imperfections, blemishes, flaws, character defects. Our grief could stem from sins of pride, obsession with food, resentment at the good fortune of others, impatience with the faults of others, seeking pleasure out of proportion to its worth, wanting more than our "fair share", lack of self control, or many others.

"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we confess our sins, God forgives us and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. In confession, our grief is comforted, our sorrow becomes rejoicing.

Lord, help us to admit our faults and accept your comfort. Amen.

Wednesday, August 8

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Mt. 5:5

Meek means humble, not lily-livered, self deprecating resignation. When we are meek, we understand our mortality and finitude. We remember that we are dust and to dust we shall return. We know that our earthly life was of God's making, not our own. We know that we did not determine the moment of our birth or of our final transformation.

In meekness, we have a glimpse of God's greatness, in-finiteness, and sovereignty. In meekness, we rejoice that Such a Power cares for us. We rejoice that Such a Power gave us Jesus, showing us how to live this mortal life. When we follow in Jesus's footsteps, we are God's children, inheriting a new, humble view of ourselves and the world around us.

Awesome God, thank you for the gift of life, earthly and eternal. Amen.

Thursday, August 9

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Mt. 5:6.

It seems normal to us to have a full fridge and water on tap or in a bottle. Unlike most of the world's people, hungering and thirsting is unfamiliar to us. We can better understand being dissatisfied. We fill our days with family, friends, sports, hobbies, organizations, church activities, etc. Precious as they are, we still have an empty spot, a void, a hole inside us.

Toting an Easter basket into the kitchen while I prepared dinner, my 3 year old said, "I have a rabbit shaped emptiness." We also have a special shaped emptiness. Just as a chocolate bunny was the only answer for her, our only way to satisfaction is to live our days according to God's will. We can never get enough of what does not fit our God shaped emptiness.

Dearest God, thank you for creating us with a hunger and thirst that only You, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit can fill. Amen.

Friday, August 10

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. Mt. 5:7.

Don't just stand there! Do something! While previous blessings focus on attitude, this one emphasizes our taking action, behaving in ways that show loving our neighbors as ourselves.

This beatitude is reinforced when we pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." And again in the parable of the unmerciful servant whose great debt was forgiven but who refused to have mercy on his own debtor. Mt. 18:33. Mercy shares the suffering of others with acts of compassion like the good Samaritan.

A man approached by a beggar said, "Do not be angry with me brother, I have nothing with me to give." The beggar replied, "But you called me brother; that was a great gift. When we are merciful, we are blessed.

Jesus, help us share the suffering of others with acts and words of compassion. Amen.

Saturday, August 11

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Mt. 5:8.

Purity is clear glass with no distortions, gold unalloyed with other metals, the white paraments of Easter. In the pure of heart, there is no hypocrisy or guile. Unlike the serpent that tempted Eve, the pure in heart say what they mean, and mean what they say. With no disparity between thought and conduct, there is congruence in words and actions.

Honest simplicity is the foundation for intimacy. This is most certainly true in our relationship with God. When we come to God in prayer, revealing our hypocrisy, our conflicts of heart and mind, our deceptions, God has the power to make us pure in heart.

Create in us a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within us. Amen.