

Blessed are...

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany) is Matthew 5:1-12. This text is Jesus proclaiming the “blessed.”

Jesus began His sermon by nine times declaring His disciples blessed because of what God had in store for them. Jesus was not making any ethical demands of His followers but was describing blessings they would fully enjoy in the new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1). That includes us.

There is a tension between the “already now” and the “not yet” of the reign of God in Jesus. It is central to the message of the Beatitudes. So certain and strong, however, is the promised final comfort that it impinges on and alters the present flawed existence. Jesus’ disciples live now in light of what is to come.

The first group of four blessings addresses Jesus’ disciples in terms of their own innate emptiness (5:3–6). Left to themselves, apart from Christ, disciples (and all people) are “poor in spirit” and “lowly,” given only to “mourning” and to “hungering.” If one were to ask, “Where is Jesus?” with regard to the first four blessings, the answer would be in the “because ... clauses!” Those who have no resources to offer God are nevertheless eternally blessed, “*because*” Jesus has come to reign over such persons in grace and mercy, “*because*” the promised end-time blessings will come to those who have nothing besides God-given faith in Jesus. He is the Servant of Yahweh, proclaiming Good News to the poor!

The second group of Beatitudes (5:7–12) still describes the disciples of Jesus: the merciful, the pure in heart, and so forth. These blessings testify that Jesus’ call to discipleship begins to transform those who are called (5:7–12). When Jesus joins men, women, and children to himself, that union begins to manifest the life of Christ himself in the lives of his disciples. That was true for Jesus’ original disciples there on the mountain in Galilee. It is also true for the disciples of Jesus today, who are baptized into a union with Christ and who comprise his church, which hears and receives the Beatitudes in faith. Indeed, the Beatitudes contain within themselves the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ power to *make* a hearer or reader into a disciple of Jesus and a member of his church. To hear and believe that one is poor in spirit, spiritually bankrupt, and then to hear Jesus pronounce blessing and the promise of the reign of heaven can make one into a believer in Jesus. Hearing and believing the Beatitudes can also sustain that faith. When life is hard and the power of evil is too great, Jesus’ words comfort us: “The poor in spirit are blessed, because the reign of heaven is theirs!”

Prayer: Gracious Savior, keep my eyes ever focused on you and your blessings, which are mine by grace alone. Amen. (TLSB)