

Matthew 5:1-13

I'm preaching gospel lessons this year and so here we are at the beatitudes and I have a confession: I looked at this reading and thought, "The beatitudes again? I've preached on this so many times, I can't find anything new here, can I?" I've looked at the commentaries before, done the study notes and the Greek – which is all good and insightful, But I've shared that with you all before and I know that you all "always remember every part of every sermon of mine, surely, so no need to repeat that right!"

And so, I thought, I will pull out Luther's works - maybe he has a page or two on the beatitudes that might provide a kernel of inspiration for me.

Well, a page or two, is actually 47 pages! 47 pages with aspects in there I had never even thought of that pertain to the beatitudes.

For Verses 1 and 2 which aren't even a beatitude but an introduction, Luther goes on for 3 pages about how to "sit down," is an official act, to take a seat of authority – and therefore the preaching office is one not taken up at will but offered by Jesus through his Church, or by the head of the household. Why? Because "We should not go around sneaking and plotting in the dark, as when we play blind man's buff... the Gospel or proclamation should not be listened to in a corner, but high up on a mountain and openly in the free daylight."

Luther goes on to talk about how text says Jesus "opened his mouth." And in this little description, Luther goes on saying that preachers must preach boldly, confidently, not opinions- but truth, regardless of who is out in the crowds in front of them. "Let[ting] it strike whomever or whatever it will."

And I thought you might appreciate this quote, again on the first two verse of our reading:

“These are the three things, so to speak, which every good preacher should do: First, he takes his place; second, he opens his mouth and says something; third, he knows when to stop.” We’ll see how I do, right!

And for 47 pages, Luther quite colorfully and engagingly teaches the beatitudes. And it leaves me humbled once more that I should “sit” in the same preaching seat as the great preachers of our time and beyond, and even, by some great mystery, Jesus himself who calls sinners to be fishers of men as we saw last week.

Humbled even more then, that this preaching, today, from Jesus, might be cast aside flippantly as if “I’ve gone over that before...” No, you dumb pastor! This is God’s Word. And even with our frail human words, as sinful people, in poem, song, a love letter, we re-read these, we listen to them again, play them on repeat, because there is meaning, a connection, and depth there beyond the first reading or listening. So how could I think that the Word of the Living God and Creator of all things could not weave for us a letter with more depth than we can imagine in it? What a fool!

And perhaps that is romantic of me to say, and maybe you think I am shining on now. Because I think it’s actually pretty common for us to read God’s Word and think, “what did I just read?”

And parts of it put us to sleep, and it’s much easier to scroll for ten minutes on our phone than do the 3 minute devotion...

Have you ever found yourself ever wanting *to want* to read the Bible? “God I want to be fed, but I pick this up and I can’t find that feeling...” And beyond that, have you ever wanted to FEEL your faith is vibrant and alive? And then you feel bad, or lost, or ungrateful because everything is

so dull, and life is passing from one struggle to the next, broken up, mercifully, by entertainment and screens where we can get our minds off things for a little while but then it's back through the motions again. And you're in a spiritual desert, apathetic wondering why it all matters, or even worse, wondering if it's even true anymore!

I was feeling a bit of that apathy: "Oh the beatitudes again?"

If that is ever you, like me: Good news is yours today from God in His beautiful word – especially today in the beatitudes.

And I've gone through the Greek with you all before and you still remember it right? How in Greek you can put the word anywhere in a sentence but Jesus, reflected well in the English, puts the word "Blessed" where? Right at the front! What does he want to emphasize to us in spiritual deserts? "That you haven't done enough, and how dare you not want to do that devotion! And you only pray when you need something! You better shape up!" Does he have stern condemnation for us? Or... blessing, even where we are at, even as the crowds sat down and this was for them too?

And in the Greek, we've been over the tenses as you see reflected well in the English, that this blessing is PRESENT tense for these people, and a future tense reward that we can look forward to. Which means that as we mourn and are meek and lowly and longing, and it doesn't FEEL like we have any blessing at all, Jesus' promise to you is that you have the blessing right now whether you feel it or not. Good news.

The beatitudes are Good News for people like us. Because it is not heaping on more burdens for God's people. It's there to show tender mercy. God knows that you want to want a lively faith

and to read his word. You're hungry and thirsting for that righteousness – take heart, you are blessed.

But still we try to muster that righteousness up for ourselves, and so we make bargains that we are going to do that devotion without fail... but we can't and we fail, and so that makes you meek – take heart, you are blessed. And we go through life and wrack up wounds and griefs and sorrows, and so we are mourning the loss of loved ones, innocence, justice, strained relationships some of it our fault some not – take heart, you are blessed. And Jesus is not here to scream at you for that, or to smite you, or turn his face against you. He is here, promising in this letter to you, that he is here to bless you. Such comfort in the first section of the beatitudes.

But then we continue reading them and get worried again in the second section, because here the blessings aren't tied to our lowliness as much. So we worry, "God, My heart isn't pure, and as often as I try to make peace I seem to cause division, and I want mercy for me, but if I am honest not for those people I don't like... I want bad things for them..." And we wonder if we have now disqualified ourselves from God's blessings again.

But here we are again, aren't we? We read those last beatitudes and think we don't measure up anymore, leaving us with longing and lacking and failure... which... takes you back to the beginning again though doesn't it? It means you are Poor, meek, hungry and thirsting. So just be honest about that. And rejoice! Because you are blessed whether you feel it or not.

Do you see the genius of the beatitudes? They are designed in God's infinite wisdom to make the hurting and wounded and doubting Christian unable to escape the blessing! We get in our own heads and convince ourselves we are disqualified from the blessing of God, but you can't,

because the more you beat yourself down, the more blessing he has in the beatitudes for you.

These are a priceless, inexhaustible promise for us!

In fact, then, the scariest place to be in the beatitudes is in a position where you don't think you need them, or the blessings they offer. "I don't need to sit at Jesus' feet, I am just fine on my own. For my heart is pure, every one else's is wrong. And I am the best forgiver, I am so merciful it's everyone else who is bad at it!"

And so the pharisees reject Christ's teaching and his blessing, because they don't need any of that. They are rich in spirit, and need no blessing.

And perhaps we are in our heads now, thinking we have disqualified ourselves because of our pride, which we do have. But there is an easy remedy for that – look in the mirror, honestly. See how you stack up against God's law. And if you think you have that covered, I doubt it, then look at the obituaries, are they still coming through? And can you beat them? Or may there come a time, even if a long way down the road, where you will be needy, broken, dying... may the Holy Spirit bring these beautiful words of the beatitudes to you then and see where you might find life.

For these words come from Jesus who knows what the deserts of life are like, he spent 40 days there being tempted, he know what fear and depression is like, he spent an evening in the garden sweating, he knows what it's like to not FEEL God's blessing, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me!" he cries. He knows what unreciprocated mercy is like, "Father forgive them they know not what they do" as they kill him. He knows what it's like to be poor, meek, lowly, persecuted, to mourn, to long for peace but get only violence. To be impure: spit and mocked and bloody and stripped...

This One dies for you, this One rises for you, overcoming it all, so we might know his blessing here and now is not meaningless but wells up to life and joy and peace – whether you feel it or not, or dare I say: especially when you don't feel it – for then you are even more lowly and therefore blessed. And yes this blessing wells up to life, they will be realized, in all his children, in all who call on his name, who are claimed by him in baptism, who are lowly and longing.

Jesus sat down and opened his mouth to preach – he's a good preacher, stern law, beautiful gospel. May the Spirit work in us a hunger and thirst to see the depth of his teaching and promises, the Bible, the more you are in it, the more it opens up, it is an inexhaustible treasure. And even when that is hard to see, and even when we can't feel the blessings, may we rest and take heart: you, Child of God, cannot escape the blessings of the beatitudes no matter how hard you try. Get out of your head, and rest in his promises. He is risen, he will keep them.

And perhaps it's time I finally learn from Luther, that third point about preaching: when to stop.

So let's stop here: with promises of blessing you can't wiggle out of, from our Savior, Jesus.

Amen.