

We will be turning to the 5th chapter of Matthew today for our gospel lesson. This chapter begins the three chapters of Matthew which are called the Sermon on the Mount. When I visited Israel several years ago I was able to visit the location of this event. Imagine a large sloping hill that heads down to a lake below. That is the location for this moment of teaching from Jesus to those who have chosen to listen.

In the first part of this sermon, Jesus shares whom he considers to be blessed by God. Let us hear the ones that Jesus says are blessed.

Read Matthew 5: 1-12

When you think of someone being blessed, who comes to your mind? Do you think about a person who has lots of money to spend? I hear people who have a lot of material things say that they have been blessed with lots of resources.

Do you think about someone who is very talented athletically? With today being the Super Bowl I bet we will hear God's name used several times today or players making motions toward the sky. After the game we will hear triumphant players yelling about how blessed they are and about how blessed their team is.

When we think about someone being blessed do we think about the couple who has lots of children? We may hear parents with large families talk about how blessed they are by all of their children.

Of course, here in the South, what do we say when we want to talk about someone? (Bless their heart)

When we think about someone being blessed do we think about that kid in our class who does not seem to work very hard but they make the best grades in the class? We talk about how blessed they are because they remember concepts so easily.

Today is Scout Sunday and we have many scouts here today. When we think about someone being blessed do we think about the Scout who is the one who seems skilled in many areas and maybe has the cool Mom or Dad who can help their son or daughter earn all of their badges?

When we think about someone being blessed, these are the types of people that come to our mind. These are the times when maybe we say we are blessed.

I can't recall very many people in the opposite categories from what I just mentioned calling themselves blessed. When someone has just seen their house burn down or seen the bankruptcy sign go up on their business, they don't usually claim to be blessed at that moment unless they are thinking about their own safety.

When a defensive back is burned for a touchdown or a quarterback throws an interception tonight I doubt you will see either of them make a motion into the sky. No prayer motions are made after a player fumbles on the one yard line. When the losing players are interviewed tonight none of them will be claiming that God blessed them tonight.

Young couples who cannot get pregnant don't usually talk about what a blessing it is to be childless. The student who works hard but still makes a bad grade does not claim in that moment to be very blessed. The Scout who can't seem to make the entire hike doesn't talk about being the blessed one.

The Greek word which is translated "blessed" in our text today from Matthew can also be translated "fortunate," or "happy," or "well off." But did you hear who Jesus says is blessed, fortunate, happy, and well off? It's not the list that I began with that our society says are fortunate, happy, and well off.

Jesus says the blessed, fortunate, happy, and well off are the ones who are poor in spirit. You may or may not know that when the gospel writer Luke records this announcement by Jesus that Luke quotes Jesus as saying that it is actually the poor and not the poor in spirit that are blessed. The poor and the poor in spirit are not the ones we lift up today as being blessed, fortunate, happy, and well off.

And how about the rest of this list? Jesus says that the ones who mourn are the blessed, fortunate, happy, and well off. Really? I don't know too many people who are feeling the pain of losing a loved one talk about how fortunate they are at that moment.

Jesus says blessed are the meek. Really? We value strength in our society not the ones that are meek.

Jesus says blessed are those who hunger and thirst for seeking to do what is right. Blessed are the merciful and pure in heart. Really? Doesn't Jesus know that bad things happen to good people? Doesn't Jesus know that sometimes people work for justice and mercy like the prophet Micah calls for but they never see their dreams become a reality?

Doesn't Jesus know that sometimes caregivers in our society burn out? The social worker who is overwhelmed by their case load, the teacher who gives her all in a economically depressed school to a student only to have that student become more influenced by the temptations from their neighborhood, the Scout volunteer who just can't volunteer anymore because they are worn out.

The business person who does the moral and ethical action only to be fired or overlooked for promotion. When those things happen I don't hear them celebrate about how happy they are.

Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers. Doesn't Jesus know that we celebrate military victories in our society won by having superior weaponry to our opponent? The peacemakers don't get the glorious headlines.

But these are the types of folks that Jesus says are blessed, fortunate, well off, and happy. Jesus says that the blessed are the poor or the poor in spirit, the ones who mourn, the ones who are meek, the ones who seek to do what is right, the merciful, and the peacemakers.

Jesus has a way of turning what our society says is important upside down. Jesus has a way of affirming the ones that others look away from or not value.

In our culture, we value the winners. Tonight's game will celebrate the winners and especially the winning quarterback. The winning quarterback will get lots of accolades while the losing quarterback will get lots of negative press. In our culture, everyone gets a trophy. I coached a lot of sports over the past 15 years and the kids always got trophies.

Our society is about affirmation to the winners and feeling sorry for the losers. And we in the church have bought into that cultural myth that we are to focus on the winners. We want the rich and wealthy and successful to join our church. We want to create worship services and programs that entertain bored parents and children.

Jesus, however, doesn't seem all that concerned about winners and losers. I would take a guess and say that Jesus does not have a hand in whether Peyton Manning or Russell Wilson is the winning quarterback tonight.

But Jesus does seem focused and committed to offering blessings to those that don't get a lot of blessings. Folks who are the forgotten. Folks who are overlooked. Folks who may be looked down upon by others.

It seems to me that if we want to seek and discover where God is then we need to be focused on aligning ourselves with the ones who are the meek, the poor and the poor in spirit, the peacemakers, the ones who seek to do right.

Many of us here battle feelings of defeat. Maybe you have tried to do the right thing but you feel that your efforts are being wasted. Maybe you feel that you are being put down for whatever reason. Maybe you feel like life is working against you right now. Maybe you are not feeling very blessed right now.

I am going to offer you an opportunity to hear and experience God's blessing upon you. Because many times we just don't feel very blessed and we need to be reminded that in God's eyes we are blessed. In God's eyes we have every reason to feel happy.

I am going to invite us into a time of prayer and then we will sing a hymn. While we sing this hymn I invite you to come forward and to receive a blessing. I will be using oil which I purchased when I was in Israel. It contains myrrh and frankincense. I am going to invite you to come forward and I will place some oil on your head and I will say to you the words, "You are a blessing to God."

I invite you forward to hear these words said to you and imagine Jesus saying these words to you.

We all need a blessing. This morning I invite you to receive one.

You are a blessing to God. AMEN.

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-Given: February 2, 2014 in Allison Creek Pres (York, SC)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Holy God, ever creating, ever working. We turn to you for wisdom and courage in trying to apply our faith to what we do for a living. Make us more faithful and more resourceful in our Christian witness and service in home and at work. We pray that you are with the young people that are here this morning. Guide them to make good choices at school and around their friends. Give them the courage to be ones who are meek, humble, righteous, and peacemakers. We pray for all of us. We live in a world which knocks us down pretty hard sometimes. We don't feel very happy and blessed. But Lord today we affirm our blessedness. We affirm that you created each of us for a special purpose and reason. Let us live into our blessedness. Let us live as people who feel loved by you and may our lives be a reflection of that love into the world.

Senior High Sunday School class

-Read Matthew 3:13-4:11

-Discuss baptism and look at baptismal questions

-Discuss temptations. Why did Matthew include this right after baptism?

-What are some temptations we face? How do we handle those?