

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Jesus has just begun his public ministry. Jesus has been ministering to crowds and as the crowds were following him, he needed a break to teach his newly called disciples. Jesus removes himself and his inner circle of disciples from the crowd and begins to teach them, even though according Matthew 7:28 some of the crowd did hear his teaching.

Jesus is about to teach his disciples for the first time at some length (as recorded in the Scriptures), but before he begins his teachings, he gives them blessed promises...we call them the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes/Blessed Promises begins this first discourse, the Sermon on the Mount. Right away in our text we have tension, even though these Beatitudes seem to be nothing but gospel. Which is true, they are gospel words; Jesus gives his disciples and frankly us, blessed promises. There is still the theological tension in the room. If you look at each one of the beatitudes, you will see some characteristic of a disciple and the blessing that comes from it. The first few beatitudes are that of one's character as a sinner...especially that of the first one, the "poor in spirit."

Jesus is teaching his disciples on the mountain and speaks these first words, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" The poor in spirit...those included in this category are those in the fallen human race. That includes Jesus' disciples. Jesus even speaks to his disciples about those who mourn, are meek, and hunger and thirst. Those are characteristics of the disciple. So, what really does that mean?

For the first disciples, it meant that they were sinners, mourning for their sin. Boy, were they ever...just think of these guys. Peter denied his Lord. Andrew, James, and John were also born sinful...they all ran away from the Lord on the night that he was betrayed. James and John along with Peter fell asleep while Jesus asked them to keep watch while He prayed. Matthew was a tax collector – he probably swindled the poor. All the disciples were sinners! Sinners were they. "Poor in Spirit" were they. They were in desperate need of spiritual food and drink.

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We are also in desperate need of spiritual food and drink. We are by nature sinful. Psalm 51:5 states: "*Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" We are the "poor in spirit" we are members of the fallen human race.

Today in our world we also mourn, are meek, and hunger and thirst. Just imagine...many people were killed in Haiti and even our country when Hurricane

Matthew with all its force flooded areas, caused mudslides, knocked out power and so much more. There is no blessed promise in a hurricane is there. News last weekend was of earthquakes in Italy. It's almost weekly that we are here of at least one cop being killed in the line of duty. We hear of terrible accidents and tragedies that take the life of young people. You and I, we are desperately needing spiritual food and drink. We desperately need the blessed promises!

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I could speculate on why these tragedies happen, but I am not going to, however when disasters like this happen one sees the faith of people come forth. You see them mourning, you see them humbled, and you see them hungering and thirsting for more than just food and drink. We also see clearly that we are "poor in spirit." We see the fallen human race, but more than that we see the fallen world that needs complete restoration.

It's not just Hurricane Matthew that brings us to our knees. It's not just the tragedies that we read and hear about. It's not just the person struggles. It's not just this election cycle. But today on this All Saints Sunday we spoke the name of the one person that died from our congregation this past year. We heard the bell toll in remembrance of her life. We all know that death is real. Death hurts...even today when we should be speaking about life...oh and I will...we continue to see how we are poor in spirit. How we need oh so much from the Almighty One – the Lord and giver of life.

What else will bring us to our knees? What else causes us to recognize that we are "poor in spirit"? Is it the fact that untimely disease threatens our life or the life of someone we love? Is it the face of addiction of you or someone close? Is it the fact that we live in a country that is oh so divided over issues such as life, family, and marriage? Is it the fact that we belong to a church that at times does not put God first? There is oh so much going on in our world that can show us and tell us that we are "poor in spirit."

I don't have to tell you that we live in a broken world. I don't have to tell you that all of us by nature are sinful. What do we do on a consistent basis that shows our sin? Perhaps it's the fact that we tend to gossip, talk behind the backs of others. Perhaps it's the fact that we tend to focus more on our earthly needs and desires rather than on our spiritual needs and desires. Maybe it's when we refuse to have an active faith and do the works that God has placed before us. Maybe it's the fact that we refuse to be merciful, refuse to be peacemakers, and refuse to have a pure heart. Sin is in us, it is all around us...sin is everywhere and the consequences of sin can be seen in all aspects of life.

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Sin could be seen in all aspects of life during the time of our text, when Jesus first preached the Sermon on the Mount to his disciples. This text isn't about the law...it's about the blessed promise of life. Jesus doesn't speak curses here. Jesus clearly speaks blessings. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn...blessed are the meek...blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...and so on." Blessed are you!! Those are characteristics of

being a disciple. And just by being a disciple, a disciple chosen by Jesus...they have the kingdom of heaven, they are comforted over their sin, they inherit the earth, their hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied and still more.

These disciples of Jesus that he is speaking to as they sit around him are indeed Saints...they are now the Saints in heaven. They are in the church triumphant singing praises to our God. These are the ones that St. John sees in the Revelation singing the praises of God.

Hear again this verse as Jesus says, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" The blessing is the same for them as it is for those that are "poor in spirit". The Kingdom of heaven. And their stories of persecution are recorded in scripture. Look to the book of Acts...persecution and martyrdom is shown. One can even look to the pages of history to see that persecution was rampant in the early years after Jesus.

These disciples have the kingdom of heaven. They are experiencing it, even though their bodies still rest in the earth somewhere. They will experience it in all fullness in the life to come.

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The kingdom of heaven is not just for the disciples of Jesus day. The kingdom of heaven is yours as well. I already told you that you are "poor in spirit". You are a member of the fallen human race...so therefore yours is the kingdom of heaven, because Jesus Christ chose you. Jesus Christ has chosen you to be one of His Saints. You are a Saint even while you live here on Earth, even before the Lord calls you home to be a member of the church triumphant.

These Beatitudes that Jesus is speaking to his disciples, his inner circle...you are now part of. You are an intended hearer of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. You are supposed to hear these Beatitudes. You are supposed to receive these blessed promises. These blessed promises are yours. They are yours for Christ's sake. They are yours because of the life that was given to you. They are yours because Jesus died and rose for you.

Today we spoke the name of Pat Eggebraaten as she died in the faith this past summer—She is now one of those who are wearing the robes that have been washed in the blood of the lamb. My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ today is about life. Today is about the Kingdom of heaven. Today is about Jesus and his promise of life to all of us who have faith and believe and trust his promises.

Each year as I reflect on All Saints Day, it's different. It's different because there are new names to add to those that are faithfully departed. New names for our congregation family, new names in our personal lives. Each and every day, people die in the Lord. Each and every day, the count of those Saint's in the Church Triumphant grows. Each one of these people now wears the white robe. And someday you will experience death and your soul will be received into heaven, and your soul will be signing praises.

When he does take us home, it will be in a place where he will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more sadness or crying or pain or anger or division or sin. We will all be fully one in Christ...in the perfect wholeness, for the day Christ returns, we will be removed from our graves and live in body and soul.

I want to point out again that verse about being persecuted for righteousness' sake. Persecution in America for our Christianity is not the same as was in the early church or even in other countries around the world, but I can tell you...it is happening. It's becoming stronger each day. Be prepared it will only get worse! Persecution for Christians does happen in American, and when you suffer because of it, know that your reward is great...and rejoice and be glad. For the true joy comes in heaven...the true joy comes in the new heavens and the new earth, when the heavens and the earth are restored to perfection. That will be the day when droughts, floods, hurricanes, blizzards, and all man-made disasters will cease. Diseases, illnesses, an death will cease!

My dear family of God all those Saints that have gone to be with the Lord have fought the good fight of faith and today we are called on to continue the fight of faith much as the saints before us did. As we sang in our sermon hymn:

For all the saints who from their labors rest,
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be forever blest.
Alleluia! Alleluia!

Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.