

## **Blessed!!!**

November 1, 2008

<sup>(1)</sup> Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, <sup>(2)</sup> and he began to teach them, saying: <sup>(3)</sup> “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>(4)</sup> Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. <sup>(5)</sup> Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. <sup>(6)</sup> Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. <sup>(7)</sup> Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. <sup>(8)</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart, for they

will see God. <sup>(9)</sup> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. <sup>(10)</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>(11)</sup> “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. <sup>(12)</sup> Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (NIV)

Focus: **Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.** (Matthew 5:4)

Dear friends in Christ,

A few years back, our dentist in Fort Wayne relocated and renamed his practice to Davinci Dental Spa. We could sit in massage chairs, have our favorite coffee, get our hands dipped in warm wax, and occasionally have some dental work done. It was a rather unique situation. One day as I was sitting in the chair, I heard the hygienists talking about a particular word. When I asked them about it, they told me that one of their motivational activities was to have a word of the day. They started at the beginning of the alphabet and chose a word that would be an encouraging word for the day. The goal was to use the word as many times as possible during the day. So when they first started, for the letter “a” they may have used the word “awesome.” For the letter “be” it might have been “bodacious.” I don’t know what they did when they got to the letters “x” and “z.” But they had their word of the day.

Today, as we focus on the saints who now dwell with Christ, the word for the day is the word **blessed!** It is the very first word recorded in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The first words usually are important words, and this one is! In the original language it is a nice sounding word, "makarios," and not one of the gruff sounding words of the German language. The word from its origin had a wonderful meaning, "transcendent happiness of life beyond care, labour and death."<sup>1</sup> But as Jesus uses the word today, He places it in a tension with some other less appealing words. The words of tension are the realities of life.

1. Blessed- the poor in Spirit.
2. Blessed- the meek.
3. Blessed- those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Today especially, the tension is very apparent as Jesus states that those who mourn are blessed. This is a rather challenging thought on this All Saints' Weekend, especially as we remember the saints who have departed from this earthly life and now dwell with Christ.<sup>2</sup> We address that challenge then, as we consider the various perceptions of death and grieving in the lives of people.

Death impacts us differently at various stages in our development. With a child, the first encounter with death may be that of the death of a family pet. A child may also encounter the death of a grandparent or great-grandparent. Death is something that is difficult for a child to understand. Halloween stories do not help with this understanding. But as the child grows into teenage years, the perception now changes. Death is something to be denied and defied. Think about the daredevil

---

<sup>1</sup> G. Kittel (editor), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 4, 362.

things done by teenagers, especially when it comes to driving cars. Any death experiences in their lives will most likely be tragic ones, particularly the death of friends in car accidents.

As middle age draws near, death becomes more real. Now most people are dealing with the death of parents and the change in family dynamics as the middle age people now become the heads and leaders of their families. Finally, if we live long enough, the confrontation with death is that of our own death. The Psalmist acknowledged this reality when he wrote,

**All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. The length of our days is seventy years- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.** (Psalm 90:9-10)

If we are blessed by God to experience the age of seventy or eighty, or perhaps eighty and ninety in our modern world today, we will have passed through each of these stages of mourning when confronted with death.

But there is a different side of mourning that cannot be overlooked. It is the tension of “blessed” and of the words “those who mourn” particularly as it relates to our sinful relationship with God. Sin can bring great mourning with it. This is what Ezra writes,

**Then Ezra withdrew from before the house of God and went to the room of Jehohanan son of Eliashib. While he was there, he ate no food and drank no water, because he continued to mourn over the unfaithfulness of the exiles.** (Ezra 10:6)

Death brings with it great mourning because it describes each of us in a broken relationship with God. The Apostle Paul writes,

---

<sup>2</sup> Saints are not just those who have departed to dwell with Christ forever. Paul typically uses the terms to also describe believers in Christ who are still alive.

**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. (Ephesians 2:1-2)**

Each of us, regardless of our age, is faced with the reality of our own deaths because of the disobedience we show in our relationship with God. It isn't mourning just during our life on earth. It is eternal! Jesus reminds us,

**“Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” (Matthew 25:41)**

This is the death that we all now face because of our sinfulness against God.

It was into this exact situation that Jesus came and spoke that simple but powerful word, **“Blessed!”** Jesus doesn't take this proclamation lightly. Jesus speaks them as One who will come to bring about a change in the lives of those who do not think they are blessed. Think about the words Jesus spoke in this sermon (Matthew 5:1-12) as you consider the words of the Prophet Isaiah.

**The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from the darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. (Isaiah 61:1-3c)**

Jesus knew that this word of the day was a word filled with tension. As He declared it, He did it knowing that He would also face tension in His ministry. He would experience the mourning of sin and its death as He looked upon the people around Him, knowing the problems of their hearts.

**O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen**

**gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.** (Matthew 23:37)

Jesus proclaimed that precious word “Blessed!” fully anticipating what was ahead for Him, knowing that He faced a journey to a place called Calvary. Jesus proclaimed that precious word “Blessed!” fully anticipating the severity of the judgment that would be placed upon Him for the sins of people who truly should be mourning their sin and death. Jesus proclaimed that precious word “Blessed!” fully anticipating that God would turn away from Him on the cross so that God would no longer need to turn away from us. Jesus proclaimed that precious word “Blessed!” fully anticipating the power of Satan and of death directed at Him. Jesus proclaimed that precious word “Blessed!” fully anticipating the mourning that the disciples would experience when they experienced the reality of His death on the cross. Jesus proclaimed with boldness, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted,” knowing that something wonderful was yet to come after Jesus entered the grave. Jesus had told the disciples,

**I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy.** (John 16:20)

The world rejoiced in His death. The disciples grieved and mourned at His death. But that grief turned to joy three days later as Jesus boldly declared “Blessed!” to those who would receive the blessing of His resurrection. That resurrection wasn’t just for the disciples of His day. That resurrection is for us today, for we want the assurance that death will lead to something far better. The promise of God is now that we are “Blessed!” as those who will one day experience their own resurrection from the dead to be with Christ forever. It is a wonderful word of comfort to us in our struggles with sin and death! Blessed!!!

Today we remember those who have departed to be with Christ. These are the folks who have borne the heat of the day and now have received the promised gift of eternal life. But we still are working in that heat of the day. We still are dealing with our mourning and grief. We are those who have been left behind to deal with the change in the family. We also know others who are mourning their loved ones. What does this message mean to us and to them today?

It means hope. For the simple word “Blessed!” (makarios) is now a word of comfort spoken by the Savior who anticipated all He would experience. This simple word now becomes the word of the day for each of us. This becomes the word for each day to provide us hope. It is a word that is so wonderful and so rich that it can easily be shared with others who are mourning. It requires no great memorization skill. It simply rolls off our tongues to those who struggle just as it rolled off the tongue of the Savior. “Blessed! Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” May this word fill our lives with courage and hope each new day, and may it fill our lives so full of peace and joy that we cannot help but tell those around us, “Blessed!” Amen!!!

Pastor David A. Easterday  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Crown Point, IN