

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
Aitkin, Minnesota
January 29, 2023
Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
ONLINE ORDER OF WORSHIP

P In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

P Beloved in the Lord! Let us draw near with a true heart and confess our sins unto God our Father, beseeching Him in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to grant us forgiveness.

P Our help is in the name of the Lord,

C **who made heaven and earth.**

P I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord,

C **and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.**

P O almighty God, merciful Father,

C **I, a poor, miserable sinner, confess unto You all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended You and justly deserved Your temporal and eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry for them and sincerely repent of them, and I pray You of Your boundless mercy and for the sake of the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to be gracious and merciful to me, a poor, sinful being.**

P Upon this your confession, I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C **Amen.**

Introit

For the LORD knows the way of the | righteous,*
but the way of the wicked will | perish.
Blessèd is the man who walks not in the counsel of the
| wicked,*
nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat
of | scoffers;
but his delight is in the law | of the LORD,*
and on his law he meditates | day and night.
He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields
its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not | wither.*
In all that he does, he | prospers.
The wicked | are not so,*
but are like chaff that the wind | drives away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the |
judgment,*
nor sinners in the congregation of the | righteous.
Glory be to the Father and | to the Son*
and to the Holy | Spirit;
as it was in the be- | ginning,*
is now, and will be forever. | Amen.
For the LORD knows the way of the | righteous,*
but the way of the wicked will | perish.

Collect of the Day

Epiphany 4

P Let us pray.

Almighty God, You know we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright. Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our

Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

Old Testament Reading

Micah 6:1–8

Hear what the LORD says:

Arise, plead your case before the mountains,
and let the hills hear your voice.

Hear, you mountains, the indictment of the LORD,
and you enduring foundations of the earth,
for the LORD has an indictment against his people,
and he will contend with Israel.

“O my people, what have I done to you?

How have I wearied you? Answer me!

For I brought you up from the land of Egypt
and redeemed you from the house of slavery,
and I sent before you Moses,
Aaron, and Miriam.

O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab
devised,

and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the saving acts of the LORD.”

“With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?

Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?”

He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

A This is the Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

Epistle

1 Corinthians 1:18–31

The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the

strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. Therefore, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

A This is the Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

Holy Gospel

Matthew 5:1–12

Seeing the crowds, [Jesus] went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

P This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C **Praise be to Thee, O Christ.**

Apostles' Creed

C **I believe in God, the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth.**

**And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died and was buried.**

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

**and sits at the right hand of God the Father
Almighty.**

**From thence He will come to judge the living
and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy Christian Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life $\bar{\text{T}}$ everlasting. Amen.**

Sermon Text – Matthew 5:1-12

Theme – “Blessed are the Poor in Spirit”

The other day, I was listening to a radio show out of the Twin Cities which features a former Timberwolves play-by-play announcer, Chad Hartman. During the program, Chad talked about a recurring dream he had, maybe once a month. The dream was that he was doing the play-by-play of a Timberwolves game and he was totally unprepared. He didn't know the names of the players and he had no notes to refer to. That's not just a dream; that's a nightmare!

It's one thing to be unprepared to do the play-by-play of a basketball game; it's another thing to be unprepared when it comes to standing before God on Judgment Day. For some, that's not going to be a bad dream; that's going to be a reality.

To prepare us for that day, we have God's Word. Today, that portion of God's Word that we are looking at is what we often call “The Beatitudes.” It is that portion of Jesus' “Sermon on the Mount” that begins: “**Blessed are the poor in spirit**” (Matthew 5:3). I want you to know that those who are “**poor in spirit**” are a lot like those who have that recurring nightmare of being unprepared for something.

To be poor means “to be without resources, to be helpless, to be destitute. But Jesus didn't just say, “**poor,**” He said, “**poor in spirit.**” That means, He is not talking about those without house and home, food and clothing. Instead, He is talking about those who are totally unprepared to stand before God. The poor in

spirit stand before God and are just like the person in the nightmare. They are totally unprepared.

How then, can Jesus say that such people are blessed? They are blessed because of what Jesus means when He says, “... **theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**” **“The kingdom of heaven”** is what God was doing in and through Jesus. The kingdom of heaven includes the perfect life that Jesus lived in our place. It includes His ministry of preaching and healing. It includes His suffering and death on the cross. It includes the promise of eternal life that comes in His resurrection. It includes His presence with us now in Word and Sacrament. It includes His final coming on the Last Day to raise our bodies and take us body and soul into His eternal presence.

When Jesus says, **“Theirs is the kingdom of heaven,”** He is saying that all the resources of the reign of heaven are there for us. Those who have nothing in themselves, have everything in Christ. The reign of heaven belongs to those who are spiritually destitute. It is there for lost sinners. It is there for you and me.

When the Holy Spirit works faith in us, He shows us that we are spiritually impoverished, and He then bestows the blessing of the reign of heaven on us. Forgiveness, Baptism, the power of the Holy Spirit, the nourishment of the Lord’s Supper, the fellowship of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and more are all ours. It is because we have the reign of heaven in Jesus Christ.

Sadly, although Jesus blesses everyone with the kingdom of heaven, some reject it. The world remains a sinful place. Those who believe in Jesus see this

rejection and it breaks their hearts. They mourn over the sin they see. Jesus said, **“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”** (Matthew 5:4). When the day comes that they shall leave this world, Jesus will comfort them and take away all their sorrows. Even as He lives with them now in a way that they cannot see, they will see Him and live with Him forever.

Those who know that they are **“poor in spirit”** cannot help but be meek. They are meek because, as sinners, meek is all that they can be. Meek describes the helpless sinner. Nevertheless, Jesus said, **“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”** (Matthew 5:5). Because of what Jesus has done for them on the cross, they will rule with Jesus on a new earth – the one that will replace this sinful world on the Last Day.

Those who receive the blessings of the reign of heaven know that Jesus Christ is their righteousness. They know that they are helpless and only the righteousness given to them by Christ saves them. Once they have tasted the righteousness of Christ, they want as much as they can get. They always hunger and thirst for more of this righteousness. Jesus said, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”** (Matthew 5:6). Here Jesus promises to satisfy their desire for righteousness.

As heaven reigns in God’s people, they shall be filled with mercy. Jesus said, **“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy”** (Matthew 5:7). This beatitude describes the Church as a community of

people who freely forgive those who sin against them. This beatitude parallels the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer: **"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."** This mercy is not something that we work in ourselves, but something that Christ works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit.

As heaven reigns in God's people, they have a pure heart. Jesus said, **"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"** (Matthew 5:8). We receive the forgiveness of sins when the Holy Spirit works faith in us so that we believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. When the Holy Spirit does that, He performs a heart transplant. He removes our dead, unbelieving heart and creates a new heart in us. When the Holy Spirit works faith in us, He gives us a pure heart. Those who have such a pure heart will see God face-to-face.

The reign of heaven gives the peace of God that passes all understanding. Jesus said, **"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"** (Matthew 5:9). By virtue of our Savior's holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death, we have peace with God. Those who have that peace readily share it with others.

The eighth beatitude is a bookend of sorts. It connects to the simple reality that the world hates Jesus and, therefore, it hates those who know that they are poor in spirit. Jesus said, **"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"** (Matthew 5:10). The righteousness in this phrase is not our good deeds. Instead, it is the

righteousness of Christ that He has earned for us with His perfect life and innocent suffering and death. The world hates Jesus and so it hates those who have His righteousness. Therefore, the world persecutes those who believe. When this happens, Jesus promises us His blessings.

The present reign of Christ in this world is a hidden reality. He rules, not from power, but from the apparent weakness of the cross. He shows His true power only to those who believe in Him. It is only on the Last day that all people will see Jesus and know that He is both Lord and Christ. Until then, He will bless His church even as she suffers persecution for His name's sake.

The beatitudes teach us that our blessings depend on Jesus. Nothing that we do can earn these blessings for we are spiritually poor. The blessings that Jesus gives us depend entirely on Him.

The summary blessing doesn't seem like much of a blessing at first. **“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you”** (Matthew 5:11-12). No one enjoys being an outcast, but how else can we expect the sinful world to treat those whose sins have been forgiven. When people in this world make us miserable because we trust in Christ, we have the promise of blessing from Jesus Himself.

It is not our job to earn the blessings of the beatitudes. Instead, Jesus has taken it on Himself to give

us these blessings in His love. In order to give us His gifts, He endured our punishment and carried our shame. These blessings come to us freely by God's grace and not by anything we do in ourselves. We can truly rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. AMEN

- P The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
- C **Amen.**

Prayer of the Church

Lord's Prayer

- C **Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.**

Benediction

LSB 202

- ℘ The Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make His face shine upon you and be
gracious unto you.
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and ℣
give you peace.
- ℭ **Amen, amen, amen.**

Acknowledgments

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