

*In Christ, you are blessed. Amen.*

Last Sunday, the Baptism of our Lord, is kinda-sorta-like Jesus' inauguration. After thirty years of obscurity in Nazareth, Jesus begins three years of traveling all over, publicly doing what the Father sent him to do.

And, so far, so good. People from all over come to Jesus (4:24). They see him cast out demons and heal the sick; now huge crowds are following him (4:25). And when he sees the crowds, Jesus goes up on a mountainside, sits down, and opens his mouth (5:1-2).

*What does it mean to follow Jesus? What does it mean to be a disciple?* In this Sermon on the Mount, Jesus answers those questions. And even though this sermon spans three whole chapters of Matthew's Gospel, it can be described with two words: uncommon sense.

Every culture of every age has a set of principles on which it operates, common sense. But in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenges common sense at every turn. He takes our natural assumptions about what really matters in life and how things should work in life, and flips the table over.

Today he begins with the Beatitudes, the "blessed are they's." With them Jesus lays the foundation for everything that follows, and the word on which he lays that foundation, the word that gets all the attention, is **blessed**. Nine times in twelve verses, **blessed**.

Literally it means *happy*. But it's odd the way that Jesus uses that word. Listen to what he says here; they don't all sound happy.

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit" (5:3).** Being poor in spirit has nothing to do with your bank account. Your spirit is your inner self. Jesus is talking about people who know that they are beggars before God – to him they offer nothing and from him they ask for everything. And to them Jesus says, **Blessed**.

**"Blessed are those who mourn" (5:4).** Those who mourn are not just people grieving a death, but people grieving that which causes death (Romans 6:23). They look around and mourn the fact that this world is not what God created it to be. You don't have to look very hard to see that.

God created a perfect world for us. But open the paper, scan your newsfeed, and mourn all the hatred and the greed and the immorality and the brutality. Mourn the fact that it all comes so naturally to the heart that beats within you and me. And to those who mourn, Jesus says, **Blessed**.

**"Blessed are the meek" (5:5).** Meek means humble. Their favorite words in the English language are, "You first." They do not demand what they deserve. And to the meek, Jesus says, **Blessed**.

**"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (5:6).** These are the people who long for the righteousness that they know they do not have, who pray, "O Lord, I am not what you created me to be." To those who want nothing more than to be right with God, Jesus says, **Blessed**.

**"Blessed are the merciful" (5:7).** The merciful do not insist on justice from everyone around them; you know, "Hurt for hurt, hate for hate, they deserve it." To those who practice mercy, Jesus says, **Blessed**.

**"Blessed are the pure in heart" (5:8).** The Bible is pretty clear that we are not pure in heart by nature (Jeremiah 17:9). But God purifies the heart by faith in Christ (1 John 1:7), and to those believers, Jesus says, **Blessed**.

**"Blessed are the peacemakers" (5:9).** Every human being enters this world as a natural born enemy of God (Romans 8:7). But in Christ alone, God makes peace, reunites us with him, and calls us to make peace with others (2 Corinthians 5:20). To the peacemakers, Jesus says, **Blessed**.

So far, so good, right? Who wouldn't read the Beatitudes and see the wisdom and beauty of what Jesus says? Why wouldn't you love someone who lives like this? What's so uncommon about it? Everything.

Did you catch Jesus' sudden turn in the Beatitudes? It is so shocking that he says it twice. **"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" (5:10-11).**

Now do you get the sense that this is uncommon sense? When you are persecuted by the world, Jesus says, **Blessed**. In fact, everything that Jesus calls blessed, our world calls cursed. How come? Because when you live like this, it shows that you belong to a kingdom that is not of this world (John 18:36).

If you are poor in spirit, with nothing to offer God, what does that say to people who are convinced that we're not all that bad and God should be happy with us the way we are?

When you're surrounded by a culture that thinks it can right every wrong on earth by its own ingenuity and goodness, what message do you send when you mourn the fact that there is no way we can make this world right because we're what's wrong with it?

To a man whose entire life is a gigantic rant about getting what he's owed, how does meekness look when you refuse what you're owed? When you hunger and thirst for righteousness found in Christ alone, how is that perceived by people who are proud of their piety?

Blessed are the merciful? When common sense dictates that if you give them an inch, they'll take a mile? The pure in heart run from the evil that starts in the heart, but culture shouts, "Embrace it! Be proud of your freedom and true to yourself." Peacemakers know that without Christ there is no peace (Ephesians 2:14), but the world says that there are many paths to God.

Don't you see? Everything that Jesus calls blessed, will make people angry with you, or laugh at you, or get as far away from you as possible.

So what do you pray when you realize that following Christ means an uncomfortable existence? "Jesus, these beatitudes look really good on paper, but they do not work in the world. The meek are abused. The merciful are doormats. The peacemakers get punched in the face. It doesn't make sense!"

When you live what Jesus has called you to be, the temptation is to cover it up, whenever it makes you or anyone else uncomfortable. And that makes sense. People see a reflection of themselves then, why wouldn't they like that? It makes them think that they're on the right track because not even the Christians bother them.

But faith needs to flourish (James 2:26). If you suppress it, your faith will die (Romans 8:13). And then you'll get along fine with the world, because you'll be just like it.

So remember just who is opening his mouth here. Jesus does not simply teach uncommon sense. He lives it. He is not asking you to do anything he has not already done for you.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, and Jesus lives like a beggar under his own law (Galatians 4:4), so he can say to you, **Blessed: "for yours is the kingdom of heaven" (5:3)**, and you through his poverty are rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

Blessed are those who mourn, and the Son of God comes down from heaven, becoming "a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering" (Isaiah 53:3); so he can say to you, **Blessed: "for you will be comforted" (5:4)**, on the Last Day, when "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Blessed are the meek, and God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, became truly human, "taking the very nature of a servant" (Philippians 2:7), so he can say to you, **Blessed: "for you will inherit the earth" (5:5)** – the new heavens and new earth at the resurrection (2 Peter 3:13).

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and Jesus takes upon himself your lack of righteousness, crying out on the cross, "I am thirsty" to fulfill all righteousness (John 19:28-30), enduring the Father's judgment for your every sin, every time you were ashamed to live who you are, so he can say to you, **Blessed: "for you will be filled" (5:6)** with my righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Blessed are the merciful, and God sends his Son into the world not to condemn it, but to save it (John 3:17), so he can say to you, **Blessed: "for you will be shown mercy" (5:7)** on Judgment Day (Matthew 25:34-36).

Blessed are the pure in heart, and Jesus lives with a perfectly pure heart, always all the time, and he gives you that perfectly pure heart, so he can say to you, **Blessed: "for you will see God" (5:8)** in eternity (1 John 3:2).

Blessed are the peacemakers, and after Jesus suffers the fate of every natural born enemy of God (Matthew 27:46), he makes peace between you and God, so he can say to you, **Blessed: "for you will be called a child of God" (5:9)**, an heir of eternal life (Galatians 3:26).

Blessed are those who are persecuted, insulted, slandered (5:10-11) – how is that not Jesus? Yeah, Jesus opens his mouth and talks a lot of uncommon sense about meekness and sacrifice and humility and gentleness. But he lives it.

And eventually, when Jesus is all done opening his mouth, he opens up something else. He opens up his own grave. Common sense tries to defeat him with power and cunning and violence and force, but the empty tomb shows that Jesus' meekness and sacrifice win the day (1 Corinthians 15:57). Whatever amount of ease or acceptance that you might gain by blending in, Jesus gives immeasurably more when he calls you **blessed**.

The world calls meekness and humility and poverty of spirit cursed, but Jesus assures you that they are **blessed**. That's the promise that Jesus makes when he opens his mouth; and the promise that he keeps when he opens his grave. Amen.