

Devotions – December 10-16, 2017

By Chuck Thomas

First Lutheran Church, Gladstone, MI

Sunday, December 10, 2017

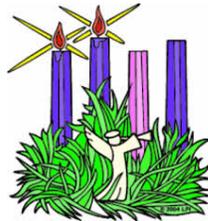
Text: Matthew 5:3

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

The Beatitudes have always been particularly uplifting to me as they reinforce the promise of everlasting life in heaven for those who have suffered in life or have sacrificed for others. According to my Concordia NIV Study Bible, the word blessed means more than “happy,” because happiness is an emotion often dependent on outward circumstances. “Blessed” here refers to the ultimate well-being and distinctive spiritual joy of those who share in salvation.

When we reflect upon what it means by “poor in spirit,” we could be drawn to thoughts of the opposite, which is spiritually proud and self-sufficient. But, are any of us really spiritually self-sufficient? Without God’s Holy Spirit and saving grace, our sinful nature interferes with our ability to be with God. We must have God’s grace to achieve everlasting life. Self-sufficiency is impossible.

Let us pray: *Dear Lord, we thank you the sacrifice of your Son and understand that we are all poor in spirit and need your Holy Spirit and saving grace to achieve salvation. Amen.*



Monday, December 11, 2017

Texts: Psalm 1:1 and Revelations 1:3

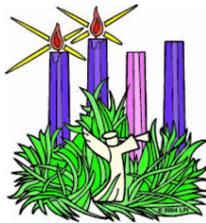
Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of the sinners or sit in the seat of the mockers.

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Continuing with the theme from yesterday, “blessed are the poor in spirit,” we look further into scripture about what it is to be “poor in spirit” but still blessed. Upon reflection of these two verses we may conclude that our daily actions play a large part in how we feel spiritually and in how well prepared we are for the end of our worldly life. With instant messaging such as

Twitter, and the 24-7 news media available to everyone, we instantly see or hear about people putting down someone who does not look or think the “right” way. Verbal bullying, or mocking someone for their beliefs, actions, or looks, has become a daily occurrence by many in our society. It seems that Psalm 1:1 is warning us to not fall into the traps created by societal norms when those norms depart from what God would have us do. And, Revelations 1:3 warns us to be ready at all times, as none of us know when God will call us home. Our words and actions have consequences. Not only do we hurt others when we denigrate, we also separate ourselves from God.

Let us pray: *We ask you, Lord, to help us remember your promise of everlasting life so that we recognize each and every day your wonderful presence in our lives. Amen.*



Tuesday, December 12, 2017

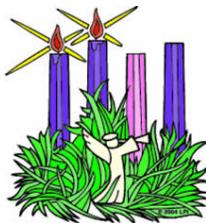
Text: Matthew 5:3

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

It is easy to relate meekness with those who are downtrodden, picked on, and ridiculed. But, that is not the meek of the beatitudes. Rather, in the Bible text meek means humble before God. Meek can mean a person with a humble and gentle heart or can describe a person who is kind and considerate to others, even to those that oppose him or her. A meek person can be someone who is approachable, not prideful or resentful. Meekness is an outward expression of inward humility, strength and spiritual poise. While others may act aggressively, the meek person walks in Godly peace. Others may claim their rights, but the meek person focuses on duty. The meek person gives way for the judgment of God instead of seeking revenge on others. Being meek does not imply weakness, sadness, or false modesty. It does portray a person who willfully and joyfully conducts their own life in service to the greatness of God.

Do you know someone who is meek? Are you meek? The reward for the meek is great!

Let us pray: *Lord, I pray for meekness and thank you for the legacy you will provide when I come into your kingdom. Help me to be humble and live for your glory, not mine. Amen.*



Wednesday, December 13, 2017

Text: Matthew 5:6

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

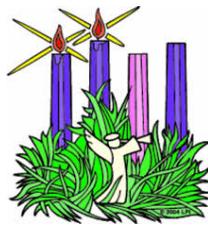
What is righteousness? Is it your own idea of what scripture says, or is it striving to achieve a world that fits your view? Is it striving to be pleasing to God, or is it a gift from God? I look out at the world and our nation today and see a sharply polarized society. I can't help but compare it to the situation in America during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Back then Martin Luther King had this to say:

"We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like rivers and righteousness is like a never ending stream".

He was speaking of social justice in 1960s America, but he was also echoing the Biblical prophets who frequently insisted that reverence for God demanded that God's people treat fellow human beings made in God's image with dignity and respect. The world is not impressed with those who make a profession of being religious but don't play fair. Neither, it seems, is God.

Martin Luther King was not wrong in applying scripture to the injustice he saw in his day. A Godly person who shares the heart of Jesus cannot help but be grieved by the injustice we witness in the world such as men and women excluded from work because of race or religion, people ridiculed because they have a different belief, innocent people killed due to terrorism in the name of religious ideology, and young girls and boys kidnapped for the sex industry. Such exploitation and abuse stirs in the Godly person a righteous indignation. We long for righteousness – a society that is fair and safe. Our faith should prompt us to pray and work towards such a world.

Let us pray: *Father in heaven, we seek your righteousness and welcome your forgiveness of our human weaknesses. We pray that the world can understand your loving grace and willingly work towards social justice for all. Amen*



Thursday, December 14, 2017

Text: Matthew 5:7

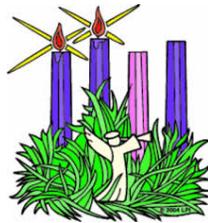
Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy.

This verse begins a common theme with this and the next three beatitudes in Matthew of being more outward toward fellow man rather than inward to God. When was the last time you witnessed an act of mercy? Or, when was the last time you performed an act of mercy?

Mercy is not a quality we see much of these days. Instead we are inundated daily, and sometimes even hourly, with media scenes and stories of violence, injustice, bigotry, prejudice, and intolerance. Acts of mercy seem to be so rare, that when they do occur, they make headline news. It is our admiration for acts of mercy that cause even simple acts to be splashed all over

the media. While people seem to admire the merciful and wish they were more like them, we rarely take the opportunity to express mercy when the chance arises. This is our challenge, not only during the Advent and Christmas seasons, but throughout the year; to accept the opportunities presented to us to be merciful.

Let us pray: *Lord, we are weak. Please help us to pass forward the forgiving mercy you show us so that we may be merciful to others when the chance is presented. Amen*



Friday, December 15, 2017

Text: Matthew 5:8

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

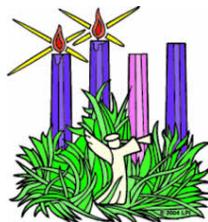
To fully understand this beatitude, we need to first understand what “heart” is in Biblical sense. From the Concordia NIV Study Bible footnote at Psalm 4:7, “heart” means the center of the human spirit, from which springs all human emotions, thoughts, motivations, courage, and action. So, we could then postulate that as our heart or center becomes more pure, our ability to welcome and see God grows wider, clearer, brighter, and with a better focus on Him.

From Scripture “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). And, “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” (1 John 3:3)

The heart is what you are, in the secrecy of your thought and feeling. Only God can truly know what is in your heart. “Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7).

So, the challenge we have is to decide if our actions, deeds and thoughts are to glorify ourselves or to glorify God. It seems that scripture is telling us that the more pure we are in our hearts or human centers, the more likely we are in that moment to be with God.

Let us pray: *Lord, help me to focus my center on you so that my words and deeds are for your glory and not self-serving. Amen*



Saturday, December 16, 2017

Text: Matthew 5:9

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

Most, if not all of us, are aware of some famous peacemakers, especially those that have recently won the Nobel Prize for Peace, including two of our past presidents. A list of 1,493 notable peacemakers throughout history can be found at the following web page:
http://peace.maripo.com/p_peacemakers.htm.

However, what about everyday peacemakers in our own corners of the world? What about you? Are we not all capable of being peacemakers each day, each week, each year? Examples of peacemakers that come to mind include, mothers who stop children from fighting, law enforcement officers who use non-violent ways to quell a domestic dispute, and someone who turns the other cheek and walks away instead of escalating an argument. Probably the most notable peacemaker is Jesus. He gave up his life to make peace between sinners and God. When we carry that message of peace to others we are also peacemakers. Wouldn't the world be a much better place if more of us chose to be peacemakers in our own homes, churches, towns, and workplaces?

Let us pray: *Lord, we fall short of the example your Son has set to be peacemakers, but we prayerfully thank you for your great patience with us as we continue to grow in our understanding of what it is you want us to be and do. Help us to be peacemakers in our everyday life. Amen*

