

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI WELS
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
January 28, 2018
The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
Matthew 5:1-12



When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up onto a mountain. When he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²He opened his mouth and began to teach them. He said these things: ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Blessed are those who mourn, because they will be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the gentle, because they will inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled. ⁷Blessed are the merciful, because they will receive mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, because they will be called sons of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven. In fact, that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

The first Bible reading you heard today was from the scroll of the Prophet Micah. Micah! What does that mean to you...the scroll of the Prophet Micah? The Lutheran Study Bible introduces Micah. **Reading Micah.** *One reclines on the grass. The other stands on a rock. The first lazily eats mutton and drinks wine. The other turns and watches the tree line at the edge of the field. The first snores. The other sees the lion coming. Micah called out against the leaders of Judah and Israel – who indulged themselves. They did not see the problems that threatened their subjects – including the threat of exile for the daughters of Zion. Yet Micah also prophesied the coming of a faithful Shepherd, who would stand guard over His people and spring to their defense with the strength of a young lion. This Ruler would come from a shepherd's town Bethlehem, ascend to the tower of the flock – David's palace and throne – and renew the kingdom! Micah's Shepherd is Jesus!*” The Lutheran Study Bible page #1485. Like the guard on the city wall Micah cries out, “Wake! Awake! Danger! Danger!” Who will listen?

Our second reading was from 1st Corinthians. The WELS Series A. Pericopes have 7 Sundays in a row – reading through 1st Corinthians. Today the Apostle Paul reminds us – we are chosen – elected – predestined--picked by grace alone – to be adopted children of God! Because our Heavenly Father chose us – and adopted us – we have both reason and ability to serve Jesus and glorify Him by what we think and say and do. We give all glory to Jesus by living lives dedicated to Him and Him alone. That’s what Jesus talks about in His *sermon on the grassy hillside* by the north end of the Sea of Galilee. It is especially important to remember that Jesus is preaching to and teaching people who know and love and believe in Him. Jesus preached the sermon on the grassy hillside to people with saving faith in their ♥! This was not a pick up group of people who just so happened to be hanging around when someone said – “Hey, that Rabbi from Nazareth is giving a talk – and it’s a nice day – and we have some free time – let’s go and hear what He has to say.” No – it was to people who by the grace of God – loved Jesus who heard Him teach:

Jesus Makes Us Happy!

1. Jesus saves us
2. Jesus shows us how to live
3. Jesus makes us strong during persecution.

As we catch up in spirit with the Lord Jesus—His public ministry is off to a very good start. Jesus found disciples—students, followers and imitators. He found fishermen and said to them, **“Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.”** And *immediately* they left everything and followed Jesus. There were difficult days, to be sure! After Jesus was anointed Prophet, Priest and King. After Jesus who never ever did anything wrong—began to assume the load of our sin and our sins—He went out into the wilderness—full of creamy rock and stone and boulder—a home for snakes and conie bears—he went 40 days and 40 nights with nothing to eat—and the devil tempted Him. “If you are the Son of God—say the word and all these stones could be nice warm—fresh baked—can’t you just smell it—bread!” Some melted butter—and some raspberry jam—and some ice cold beverage to wash it down. That would make your tummy happy—and so? Jesus told the devil, “People don’t live on whole wheat—oat nut bread—but on every Word that comes from the mouth of God!” There was a rocky start at the Synagogue in Nazareth where Jesus grew up. ¹⁷ **The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:** ¹⁸ **The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed,** ¹⁹ **and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.** ²⁰ **He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.** ²¹ **He began to tell them, “Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** ...²⁸ **All those who were in the synagogue were filled with rage when they heard these things.** ²⁹ **They got up and drove him out of the town. They led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff.** ³⁰ **But he passed through the middle of them and went on his way.** Luke chapter 4. But now things were going better. People heard how Jesus was curing every sickness and disease. He gave sight to the blind—unstopped the ears of the deaf. Jesus made lame people able to walk—jump and run. Jesus cleansed lepers—drove out demons—even raised the dead! Jesus preached the Gospel of sin forgiven and heaven won—God’s unconditional forgiving love! What was not to love?

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up onto a mountain. When he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²**He opened his mouth and began to teach them. He said these things:** ³**“Blessed are the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** The Kingdom of God is not like any other kingdom. In this world people who are pushy and aggressive often seem to come out ahead. *First come-first served* sometimes seems to be law of the land. Push the other guy out of the way. Elbow your way to the front of the line! Grab first and hang on tightly to what you want. Look out for #1. If you don’t look out for yourself—nobody will! That’s not how Jesus does things. In the Kingdom of God—**the last shall be first—and the first shall be last.** In the Kingdom of God—**when I am weak—then I am strong.** In the Kingdom of God—**Thy will not mine be done!** In the Kingdom of God—when someone hits you on the one cheek—turn to them the other also! You don’t hear that a lot in government—don’t hear it in Congress—don’t hear it in cut-throat business—don’t hear it in public universities or in the UN! The world is full of Pharisees—*self-righteous—self-seeking—self-serving—selfish* people. Remember the Pharisee prayed, “I thank you Lord that I am not like some people—I fast—I give abundant thank-offerings. I do the right thing. I’m not like some people I know—like that Tax Collector. The Tax Collector who stood at a distance—didn’t even look up to Heaven—but hit his ♥ and prayed, **“God be merciful to me a sinner!”** That’s the one who went home *forgiven*—the humble tax collector.

⁴**Blessed are those who mourn, because they will be comforted.** Here—again—a seeming contradiction. Happy are the sad people? This is not Eeyore—forever saying, “Oh, dear! Oh, my! Oh,

no!" There is sadness in this world – because this world is infected – fatally flawed by sin. For a mere \$19.37 you can order a street sign that says, Easy Street – free shipping off of e-bay. It would be tempting to think – living close to Jesus – he would put this cloak of invincibility around you – like an umbrella – so that all the day to day troubles and problems – would not get you wet. It would be tempting to think that Jesus would keep you safe from all kinds of troubles and prevent the day to day frustrations that come! Quite the opposite is true. The Apostle Paul told the beleaguered believers in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch: **"We must go through many hardships/much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God!"** Acts 14:22 On the night He was betrayed Jesus said: ³³**I have told you these things, so that you may have peace in me. In this world you are going to have trouble. But be courageous! I have overcome the world."** John 16:33 In this world people will have troubles. The phone will ring in the wee hours of the morning – and the voice of family or best friends will be indistinguishable – as they tell us someone we love – without warning has gone home to heaven. And that last part is the most important. They have gone home to Heaven – **where this is no more death or mourning or crying or pain – where the old order of thing has passed away – where Jesus has made everything new!"** Revelation 21:4

⁵**Blessed are the gentle, because they will inherit the earth.** The NIV used to say blessed are the meek. The problem with that is – people confuse meek with weak – the quiet little wall flower who never has the courage nor the strength to speak up – and so they are pushed around – treated like door mats – misused and abused and entirely taken advantage of. It is perhaps an improvement to say **blessed are the gentle.** Gentle can be very strong – yet always careful never to cause hurt or harm. Our ultimate example here, too, is of course – the Lord Jesus. Simon Peter wrote, ²¹**Indeed, you were called to do this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you would follow in his steps.** ²²**He did not commit a sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.** ²³**When he was insulted, he did not insult in return. When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.** ²⁴**He himself carried our sins in his body on the tree so that we would be dead to sins and alive to righteousness. By his wounds you were healed.** ²⁵**For you were like sheep going astray, but you are now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.** 1 Peter chapter 3.

⁶**Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled.** ⁷**Blessed are the merciful, because they will receive mercy.** ⁸**Blessed are the pure in heart, because they will see God.** If by the grace of God you travel overseas – odds are you will see malnutrition! In Nigeria, Benin and Togo (formerly French Togoland) you see children malnourished. Their arms and legs are the proverbial toothpicks. Their eyes are sunken – their teeth terrible. It is difficult to eat a chicken that is malnourished – fried in palm oil – American teeth can't bite through the skin – yet Nigerians actually eat the splintered chicken bones because they contain some protein. Haitian orphans eat a literal Frisbee of beans and rice around noon – their only meal all day. Peruvian natives deep in the Amazon Rainforest wake up in the morning – and begin their quest for something/anything to eat. There is danger from the Piranha, crocodiles and anacondas who want to eat them! It is painful to see people so malnourished you can see all their bones. Does Jesus understand such pain and hurt? Remember the words of Psalm 22? **Many bulls surround me. Strong bulls from Bashan encircle me.** ¹³**Enemies open their mouths wide against me, like a lion that tears its prey and roars.** ¹⁴**Like water I am poured out. All my bones are pulled apart. My heart has become like wax. It has melted in the middle of my chest.** ¹⁵**My strength is dried up like broken pottery, and my tongue is stuck to the roof of my mouth. You lay me in the dust of death.** ¹⁶**For dogs have surrounded me. A band of evil men has encircled me. They have pierced my hands and my feet.** ¹⁷**I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me.** ¹⁸**They divide my garments among them. For my clothing they cast lots.** Psalm 22 EHV Imagine if you could see how nourished our faith is – or isn't! In God's Word there is the sincere milk of the Gospel – living water – the Bread of Life in the means of grace to nourish and strengthen our faith!

¹¹“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven. In fact, that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” There are people everywhere who will insult the one true God – will insult God’s Word – and will insult you – if they find out you believe what the Bible says about Creation, about Jesus dying on the \dagger on Good Friday and rising from the dead on Easter Sunday. They mock the concept of the flaming lake of fire in hell and the truth of Heaven. They trust in science – in principles of aerodynamics – in things they can see with their eyes and calculate with their computers. And yet – they cannot explain why it is – that bumble bees can fly. The truth is bumble bees can flap their small wings some 250 times in the moment it takes you to say, “One Mississippi!” Bumble bee wings can twist in mid-flap! Bumble bee wings go far faster than a humming bird’s wings – and humming birds are anything but slow! The short answer is – “Bumble bees can fly because Jesus designed them to fly! Plain and simple! Jesus is the answer to all sorts of things people can’t explain. So – don’t be surprised when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you – because of Jesus!” That’s the way they treated Elijah and Elisha – Jeremiah and Ezekiel. That’s the way they treated Simon Peter and the disciple Jesus loved – and the Apostle Paul. That’s the way they treated Savanarola and Hus in Czechoslovakia and Martin Luther. And that’s the way they will treat us too – until Jesus brings us all safely home to Heaven. We pray **even so come quickly, Lord Jesus** to take us where we will be forever blessed by grace alone! Amen!

To God alone all glory!



