

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, January 29th, 2023
Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Living in Christ
Fourth Sunday after Epiphany
Matthew 5:1-12**

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

God calls us to seek justice:

Let Christ's love for the poor and hungry fill the earth.

God calls us to show kindness,

Let Christ's light shine in places of brokenness and despair.

God calls us to walk humbly in the Spirit,

Let us join the work of the kingdom in humility and hope.

Called, blessed and inspired, let us worship God together.

Amen.

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God of wisdom and blessing,

On this blessed day we come into the warmth of your presence.

Here we find shelter in the strength of your promises;

here we find welcome in your tender care.

Grateful for the protection you provide,

thankful for the comfort of your community,

we offer our praise to you.

For you give blessing when the world condemns;

you bring freedom when the culture confines.

Embrace us with your love in this hour of worship

as we offer you our love in return.

Opening Hymn #411: "Stand Up and Bless the Lord"

Stand up and bless the Lord;

God's people now rejoice;

stand up and bless the Lord your God

with heart and soul and voice.

God is our strength and song;
 now is salvation ours.
 God's love in Christ we now proclaim
 with all our ransomed powers.

Stand up and bless the Lord;
 the Lord your God adore;
 stand up and bless God's glorious name
 henceforth forevermore.

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
 Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

**God of the ages,
 we confess the world's wisdom attracts us, in advertisement and argument.
 We fail to measure messages according to the wisdom in your Word.
 We find calls to do justice too demanding,
 for the world has taught us to look to our own interests first.
 Forgive us, we pray.
 Renew us with your mercy,
 so that we may walk more humbly with you and each other day by day. Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
 Though God knows our failings, forgiveness is ours in Jesus Christ.
 Rejoice and be glad for his renewing love.

The Lord's Prayer

**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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen.**

Music Ministry: "Lead Us On, Oh Lord" by Choir

Responsive Reading

Question 120. What is the ninth commandment?

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16; Deuteronomy 5:20).

Question 121. What do we learn from this commandment?

All forms of tampering with the truth are forbidden. The ninth commandment prohibits, “whatever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbor’s good name.” (Westminster Shorter Catechism). Lying in the form of propaganda, false advertising, the distortion of the truth and stereotyping of racial and other groups are wrong as they corrupt our common life.

Deut 19:18-19, Ps 5:4-6, Prov 14:5, Jas 4:11

Question 122. What is the tenth commandment?

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21).

Question 123. What do we learn from this commandment?

The last commandment forbids any inward attitude or outward action that desires another person’s belongings, livelihood, or status. When we covet what others have we neglect what we already have. Rather, we are to live before God with gratitude and joy, disciplining our inward desires and actions, sharing as God’s stewards the good things of this world.

Jer 6:13, Mic 2:1-2, Lk 12:15

Children’s Hymn #319: “Wherever I May Wander”

Wherever I may wonder,
Wherever I may be,
I’m certain of my Maker’s love;
God’s care is over me.
God made the great high mountains,
And made the wide blue sea;
God made the sky where airplanes fly;
God made the world, and me.

Throughout the whole creation,
I see God’s loving care
For everyone in every land,
God’s children everywhere.
Wherever I may wander,
Wherever I may be,
I’m certain of my Maker’s love;
God’s care is over me.

Children’s Lesson

Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

Matthew 5:1-12

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

² And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

⁵ "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

⁶ "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

⁷ "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

⁸ "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

¹⁰ "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Sermon

I find it very interesting that on the day that we finish off our look at the ten commandments in the catechisms that we look at this piece of scripture in the book of Matthew. The ten commandments are a list of things which the people of God should not do, and the sermon on the mount delivers a message on all of the things that the people of God should do.

The sermon on the mount is perhaps one of the best-known pieces of preaching by Jesus in the Bible and it is filled with valuable lessons for those who want to be true followers of Christ. It begins with the beatitudes, which in essence means joy or happiness. Jesus is describing the happiness that his followers will find in their lives when they are in a right relationship with God, because their happiness does not come from the things and situations that they are in while in this world, but only from that relationship with their eternal creator, as they know that all happiness comes from God.

That is what makes the beatitudes so valuable as Christians, they give a clear picture of the qualities of the heart of true Christians and the blessings that will fall upon them. This means that for us who are still suffering through the trials and tribulations of this world, these are the blessings of God which will come upon his people as we grow in our relationship in him. Taken all together we see the image of the perfect Christian which we will become when we are fully sanctified in our earthy death and heavenly birth.

These blessings were meant as an example for all followers of Christ on how they were called to live their lives as an example of Christ in this world.

Another point we should notice is in the very first verse of the scripture today. Jesus went up the mountain, away from the crowds and when his disciple sat down, he taught them. This whole sermon on the mount was not delivered to people who were being converted but to people who were already disciples of Christ. This directly countered the teachings of the Sadducees and Pharisees who taught that people should live by the letter of the law, so much so that they had created volumes of books with additional laws to try to make sure no one could violate the law, but Jesus is saying here if you live according to your heart, you will naturally obey the law. There is a difference way we behave because of the rules and way we behave when we love someone.

This is why these blessings are so important for Christians to know and understand, because regardless of the situation, trial, or tribulation we find ourselves in during our life, they serve as a guide for us in walking with Christ, they speak to every circumstance. They show us how we behave when we love Christ first, which means they are not a choose the ones you like and disregard the rest, they all come together, and that means that they will apply in every circumstance and situation. There may be times when some apply stronger than others, but they are all always present in our walk with the Lord. You will also notice that as the list of blessings goes from the first to the eight, they become more intense and serious in our lives, and each helps strengthen our relationship with God and the happiness that we will find in our lives through him.

So let us look at these traits of Character the Christians develop through the work of the Holy Spirit as they walk with Christ.

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

How happy are the poor in spirit, he is speaking of spiritual poverty, not material poverty. People who are poor in spirit recognize their own emptiness, they are people who recognize their own sinful nature and their own inability to defeat sin in their lives. These are people who humble themselves and submit themselves to God and his authority in their lives. They have no arrogance, no self-righteousness, and no self-sufficiency.

Because they are poor in spirit they are come to God without pride or arrogance to seek His help and His mercy in their lives. It is this characteristic which grants us the right to enter into the kingdom of heaven as a son or daughter of the Lord.

Monty Williams wrote that it is this first beatitude which is the key to unlocking the others in our life. He said, ‘Poverty of spirit is the radical awareness of our nothingness and of our dependence on Divine Providence for health, approval, image, identity, friendship, even life itself.’ Once we are poor in spirit our focus has turned to God first.

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

We will all go through times of mourning in this life. We will all suffer defeats and losses. Sometimes it may be losses of loved ones because of death, or we could be mourning the loss of a job, loss of friends or family relationships, loss can appear in our lives in many forms. Even the loss of regular routine, many of us know how Covid caused so many people to become saddened because of the loss of ability to be social in the groups that we have become to depend upon for relationship. Remember that when we looked at the seasons of life God promised us that season of mourning would not last forever and each of us that has experienced a loss knows that this is true, God will always bring us through mourning by being there with us in our times of loss.

This could also be the spiritual mourning we go through as we repent and move away from the person we were and become the person that Christ is calling for us to become. We all know the guilt that we have felt over our sinful nature and the comfort that we receive in knowing that God loves us and forgives us of our failings.

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

The way the Bible describes the meek is those who have a spirit of gentleness and self-control. Meek does not mean weak; it does not mean that we give into the ways of this world. Meekness means we cultivate a spirit that wants to align with the will of God, rather than seeking our own paths. Meekness means not thinking less of yourself, but instead thinking of yourself less.

We all know that under stress and pressure we can often react in very unchristian ways, meekness is our battle against that behavior. The meaning of this word translated as meekness in Greek is closely related to the word used to domesticate animals. When we are not God's children, we are subject to our wild and natural instincts, but when we are children of God our obedience to our Master helps us to overcome that wildness in service to Him. We gain that spirit of gentleness and self-control as we walk among the things in this world that use to make us irritable, fearful, and self-seeking.

For those who become meek, they will inherit the earth in the New Jerusalem in their eternal life.

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

Blessed are those who seek, who hunger and thirst, for the right way to live, the Christian way to live in this world. The closer our walk with Christ become the clearer it is that this world is walking in the opposite direction. Those who are truly children of God seek his righteousness, they want to see his justice in the world.

For some this might become obeying the letter of the law, which is what happened to the Pharisees and Sadducees, they created rules to try to make it so they could perfectly obey

the letter of law and became filled with self-righteousness. This is not what this is speaking about.

Everyone of us knows that it is impossible for us to obey God's law perfectly, our sinful nature will always pull us in the opposite direction, so we should never be filled with self-righteousness. Our inability to follow the law should remind us constantly of our need of the salvation we have in Jesus Christ.

This means that we want to live a life which honors God, honors Christ, a life in which we show the mercy to others which God has shown us in our own lives. One in which we seek to help others find salvation in Christ. One in which we try to help those in need in this world and show them the love and compassion that Christ has shown us in our own lives.

Once we have developed this hunger for his righteousness, we will be satisfied with the things which we have, because we know that God will provide us with everything we need.

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

We are called to be merciful, loving and forgiving in this world. Justice is getting what we deserve, mercy is not getting what we deserve. God wants us to be merciful because he was merciful with us. We all deserve death, we are all sinners, we have all fallen short of the Glory of God. God sent his son to die upon the cross and take on our sin so that we do not have to pay the debt which we owe for our sins. He shows his mercy on any who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and because of that we should show our mercy on others.

This means we are called to go out into the world and display God's mercy. To treat others with kindness, in a world that is preoccupied with selfishness and self-interest. To help those in need, even when it is difficult. To forgive, even when we do not want to.

If we do not show mercy, we are being both hypocritical and judgmental. We are hypocritical in that we are receiving mercy and not giving mercy, we are not practicing what we preach. And is judgmental in the sense that, we do not show mercy to others we are in essence saying that they do not deserve the same mercy which we have received from God for the things which we have done that deserve his judgement.

The promise from God is that we will receive his mercy when we share that mercy with others.

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

What is a pure heart? It begins when we Become true followers of Jesus and the Holy Spirit gives us a new heart and it continues through that process of progressive

transformation, that gradual change in who we are, that we spoke about a few weeks ago. A person that has a pure heart, in all of their thoughts, desires, decisions and intention has the desire to do what is pleasing to God. From a pure heart can only come good things, acts of love and mercy, the desires for justice and righteousness and because of this they seek to always be doing things which please God. This is a reminder that God is more concerned about what is in our heart that what the world sees in us.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were very concerned about the external appearances, they followed the law to the letter. People of this world do the same, on the outside they are very concerned about looking, acting and people believing that they are Christian. The Pharisees followed every written letter of the law to the T, they followed every ritual aspect of cleansing to make sure that everyone saw them as being pure and clean, however, their hearts were not given the same cleansing care.

All the cleansing and bathing that they did could not clean their hearts, only God can do that. Even if someone follows all of the rituals and practices of the Church in this world, unless they have a heart that is being cleansed by the Holy Spirit, they will not find salvation.

Getting a pure heart means walking in the light, walking with God, learning to live at all times according to his Word, and as we do so we will find that he is at work cleaning our heart, purifying it as we grow in our faith and knowledge of God.

As the light of the Lord reveals the impurities of our heart, we will have to face them, deal with them, and wash them away with the help of the Holy Spirit.

This is the promise, that once we have the Holy Spirit in our new hearts, we are saved, we have positional sanctification and because that was a gift from God it can never be lost or taken away. We will see God when we die and move onto eternal life.

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

Our world is filled with strife and conflict, often in many places there is no hope of ever attaining peace or unity. We are called to make peace with people. Peace begins with reconciliation with God and extends into reconciliation with others.

Peacemakers work to promote God's kingdom, reconciling adversaries, quenching the fires of anger and hatred, uniting those who have become divided and promoting all of the attributes that God calls for in his people.

Peacemakers make peace, not because they are always the ones at odds with others, but because we are people who seek the peace of the Lord in this world. Peace means more than just ending conflict, it means bringing good into other peoples live.

Peacemakers also know that they can never compromise the truth for the sake of making peace. You cannot change the truth or ignore the truth in making peace. You cannot ignore evil or do evil just for the sake of peace. Peace makers in Jesus will always strive to please the Lord and be his people in their efforts to make peace.

The promise to those who make peace is that they shall be called sons and daughters of God. God did this when he made peace with man through the cross, and we are called to make peace with others in this world because of the peace he has made with us. We should seek help to find peace in our own hearts with the help of God and help others find peace in their own hearts by developing a relationship with 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.'

This last beatitude is the only one that is expanded upon, it is not just one verse but three.

Living for Christ even in good times and in countries that are open to Christianity brings a backlash against Christian ways from unbelievers and other who disagree with the truths of God's Word. Even when we are doing our best to be Christians, living with peace, mercy, meekness in all of our interactions with other people, they will find a way to attack and criticize us and our faith.

Yet this is nothing compared to the persecution that the early Christians faced, many of them faced death at the hands of the governing bodies because of their faith. You and I are not facing that possibility right now, but in many places around the world that is a reality that Christians face in their daily lives. In places like North Korea, China, and in many of the Muslim nations around the world, Christians are persecuted, their possessions are taken away, their livelihoods are taken away, they are second class citizens, and at times even their lives are taken because they refuse to turn from their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

This beatitude should remind us that even though we live in a time and place that we are not persecuted heavily for our faith, that could change. Jesus promised us that as his follower we would face persecution, we should be mentally and spiritually be prepared for the day that we may not have the same liberties in our faith that we do today. What kind of Christian will we be then? When our life is on the line will we still be as bold in our faith as we are now when our life is safe? Would we be willing to actually die for our faith? Jesus warns us that this is part of being a follower of Christ.

The promise is the same here in the final beatitude as in the first, the kingdom of heaven. We are meant to keep our eyes, our hearts and our minds fixed upon God.

When we get overly concerned with the things of the world this can trouble us, but when we fix our eyes upon the Lord, we will find all of these beatitudes in our lives.

Living in Christ in this world means we live as citizens of Heaven here on Earth, set apart from the ways of the world, championing God's righteousness, God's Justice, showing mercy, remaining meek and poor in spirit in all that we do. In living this way we build on our relationship with God and enjoy the happiness that comes to our soul in knowing that we are one of His children.

Let us Pray,

Perfect Love

Grant us, dearest Lord,
to know you, and love you, and rejoice in you.
And, if we cannot do these perfectly in this life,
Let us at least advance to higher degrees every day,
until we can come to do them in perfection.
Let the knowledge of you increase in us here,
that it may be full hereafter.
Let the love of you grow every day more and more here,
that it may be perfect hereafter;
that our joy may be full in you.
We know, O God, that you are a God of truth,
O make good your gracious promises to us,
that our joy may be full;
to your honor and glory,
with the Father and the Holy Spirit you live and reign,
one God, now and forever. Amen.

Source: Augustine of Hippo, Fourth Century

Music Ministry: "Seek Ye First" by Glenda Gould, Jane Hartin, Reiner Kuehn & Rob Noyes

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. standrewsperthoffering@gmail.com If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish

any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.

Offertory Prayer
(Congregant Prepared)

Closing Hymn #431: "Jesus, Where'er Thy People Meet"

Jesus, wher e'er thy people meet,
there they behold thy mercy seat;
where'er they seek thee thou art found,
and every place is hallowed ground.

Here may we prove the power of prayer
to strengthen faith and sweeten care,
to teach our faint desires to rise,
and bring all heaven before our eyes.

Lord, we are few, but thou art near,
nor short thine arm, nor deaf thine ear;
oh rend the heavens, come quickly down
and make a thousand hearts thine own.

Pastoral Prayer

Blessed are you, most holy God,
for you give release to the captives and food to the hungry.
Bless us as we hunger and thirst for your justice and righteousness.
May all who are needy find their hope in you.

Compassionate God, we thank you for your mercy.
You give pardon for our sin and call us to forgive others.
Embrace with your renewing grace those who are resentful or discouraged.
Help us serve as instruments of reconciliation when discord or conflict arises.

Righteous God, we thank you for your justice.
You watch over all who suffer and empower your people to act for good.
Bless the work of our church and its partners
to advocate for justice and dignity in our communities and in your world.
Keep safe all who live under threat of violence or struggle for life's necessities.

Caring God, we thank you for your comfort.
You strengthen us when we are weak and pick us up when we fall.
Bless us as we support and care for one another in this community.
Surround all who mourn with the warmth of your love and the light of our hope

in Christ Jesus.

God of new life, we give you thanks for your enlivening Spirit.
You give courage to the persecuted and inspire the weary.
Bless us as we strive to make a difference as a community in Christ's name.
Unite your Church by the power of your Holy Spirit,
and strengthen our common witness with the gifts you offer us through Jesus Christ,
our Lord and Saviour, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
as the One True Living God,
Amen.

Benediction

May the God of justice strengthen your will to serve.
May the Christ of compassion inspire your heart to love.
May the Holy Spirit walk with you in wisdom this day and always.