

**Blessed only through the inward and the outward expression of  
the Gospel in our lives**

**Rev. Terrance Jacob on Matt 5:1-12 at SALC 2/1/25**

Many people have the habit of saying “God bless you!” as a salutary phrase. What does it mean to be blessed? Everyone wants to feel blessed and highly favored (deep church language). Well actually, according to the Amplified translation of the Bible, the beatitudes’, that is the “blessed are the... (a whole list follows)” means “happy, blessed and flourishing”. Maybe from now on I should say, “God flourish you, Brother/Sister!” That wouldn't sound right. English is a limited language, when compared to the ancient languages. Worse still, bible translations are not easy, because as we know: words don't really have meanings, meanings have/need/use words. So simply using word for word translation does not always capture what meaning wants to convey. I don't know if you know what I mean... ‘cos words fail me. “Word’s fail me” is a common expression that proves that.

Let's illustrate this by looking at some of the text today from the Amplified Version of the Bible.

3 “Blessed [spiritually prosperous, happy, to be admired] are the poor in spirit [those devoid of spiritual arrogance, those who regard themselves as insignificant], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [both now and forever]. Do you see how the meaning of “blessed” needs more words to explain it?

4 “Blessed [forgiven, refreshed by God’s grace] are those who mourn [over their sins and repent], for they will be comforted [when the burden of sin is lifted].

5 “Blessed [inwardly peaceful, spiritually secure, worthy of respect] are the [b]gentle [the kind-hearted, the sweet-spirited, the self-controlled], for they will inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed [joyful, nourished by God’s goodness] are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [those who actively seek right standing with God], for they will be [completely] satisfied.

7 “Blessed [content, sheltered by God’s promises] are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 “Blessed [anticipating God’s presence, spiritually mature] are the pure in heart [those with integrity, moral courage, and godly character], for they will see God.

9 “Blessed [spiritually calm with life-joy in God’s favor] are the makers and maintainers of peace, for they will [express His character and] be called the sons of God.

10 “Blessed [comforted by inner peace and God’s love] are those who are persecuted for [c]doing that which is morally right, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [both now and forever].

11 “Blessed [morally courageous and spiritually alive with life-joy in God’s goodness] are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil things against you because of [your association with] Me. 12 Be glad and exceedingly joyful, for your reward in heaven is great [absolutely inexhaustible]; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

That's quite a translation! But it does help explain things, right?

But isn't that adding words to the red letter (you know the words of Jesus in the red letter edition, which some Christian claim are the only things we should follow)? No. It goes to the many uses of words, explores meanings in various contexts, drawing on how words are used in the culture and time, and then gives us the meaning, as best as it can be captured in our language.

A modern day example could be this. I'm talking to you all and I say, “I heard that ICE is killing US citizens in Minneapolis, and I'm like, ‘Isn't that illegal to shoot someone in the back when he's being held on the ground, even if it was a State of Emergency?’” Imagine something translating, first “I was like”. It could say “pastor liked or approved that it was illegal, etc.” What would they do with the phrase “State of Emergency”? Name our 51st state as “Emergency”... not Greenland? Too soon?

Okay, you get the point - get your head out of the politics, preacher!

So blessed are the poor in spirit - those that do not trust their own sense of pride, keep in check their arrogance - for theirs is the kingdom of God. It is so easy to become spiritually arrogant when you've grown up in the church, perhaps studied theology (formally or non-formally), read your bible and prayed for 5 minutes a day since January 1st (I'm being facetious in reference to my first sermon of 2026). Jesus is saying that the kingdom of God consists of those who give no value to themselves as it relates to salvation and spiritual matters. It's all of God, all of Grace. The work of the Spirit alone. We just submit.

The next 3 “blesseds” build on or complement this. “those who mourn... over their sins and repent, for they will be relieved and comforted. Then those who are gentle and meek, sweet-spirited will inherit the earth. Then those who are hungry for righteousness, longing to be in right standing with God, for they will be satisfied.

Bible commentators say that up until that blessed, Jesus the preacher is teaching about our inward expression of the faith or the Gospel. Our personal religion, if you will.

Then Jesus’s sermon goes to the blessedness for those who live that faith in the world. Blessed are those who show mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, that is, those with moral courage and integrity in this world of smoke and mirrors and hidden agendas. Then the most well known blessed, peacemakers - those who make and maintain peace. Those who are not quiet when there is a genocide, or when someone is shot in cold blood, even if the one shot hated people or color, considering themselves as the superior, pure race. Put another way, blessed are you when you reflect the love and justice of God, for you will be called children of God.

Then the preacher pushes us further out of our comfortable “me and my Jesus personal development world”: blessed - comforted by inner peace - are those who are persecuted for doing what is morally right -

like protecting children and the marginalized in society - for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Do you see that the justice activists AND the personal religion, poor in spirit, "emptying themselves of self to allow Jesus to fill them" people are BOTH reflecting the kingdom of God? Can you see that? It excites me. We are both and. One might say it brings the so-called conservative and the so-called liberal into one... and many of you are saying, God forbid! Those are labels loosely used in the ELCA to distinguish the inward looking from the outward looking/doing Lutherans. But what if that is our calling to bring them together, St. Andrew? Our calling as a church in Williamson County, which has approved the establishment of White Supremacist aligned clubs in all our schools, while we have a pastor of color and a gay bishop? What if we - bible believing, Christ-centered, balanced, people of grace - become peacemakers gathering people, not around party but around God's justice... while grounded in biblical spirituality and the theology of the Cross? I believe, if anyone can, we can... not for our sake but for the sake of the Gospel. We may face ridicule from our respective camps, but listen to the last lesson of Jesus the preacher - at least the last in today's text.

Blessed, morally courageous, spiritually alive with life-joy in God's goodness, are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil things about you because of your association with me (Jesus) for your reward is great in heaven.

Come let's live the whole Gospel completely and fully. Developing and maintaining our spiritual selves AND living the Gospel boldly in the world, and we will be blessed, highly favored, joy-filled and admired in Christ. Amen.