

A Sermon by the Rev. Roger Wm. Smith on the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany, January 30, 2011 at The Chapel of St. Mark in Port Royal, South Carolina.

The Blessed Ones

This sermon is dedicated to the memory of The Rev. Father Wesley Henry Martin, the late husband of our dear friend and parishioner Ginny Martin. In 1996 after 26 years of ministry in New York and New Jersey, Wes and Ginny moved to Beaufort. They were our neighbors in Newpoint. Wes was taken home 12 years ago. Today we remember the date of his departure. It was Jan. 27th, 1999.

On this occasion I'd like us to consider that word "Blessed". We've just heard the opening lines of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-12) in which Jesus describes the meaning and the rewards of blessedness. The words are so very familiar we could almost recite them from memory.

The sermon opens with the declaration "Blessed are the poor in spirit".... The word "blessed" as it is used here is very special. It is the Greek word *makarios*. It was used in ancient mythology to describe the gods. The implication is that god-like joy comes to those who follow the teachings of Christ. The meaning of *makarios* is not easy to express in English. It describes that joy which has its secret within itself. It is serene and untouchable. It is a joy completely independent of all the changes and chances of this life.

The *Good News* version of the Bible uses the word "happy".... "How happy are those who know they are spiritually poor." This translation first appeared in 1966. That should tell us something about why they chose the term "happy". 1966 was in the Age of *Aquarius*. But that is not an accurate rendering of the text. "Happy" contains the root "hap", which means chance or happenstance. Happiness depends on the changes and chances of life. It is something that life may give and which life may also destroy. This blessedness, of which Jesus spoke, on the other hand, is completely untouchable... indestructible. In another place Jesus said, "No one will take your joy from you." (John 16:22). The opening lines of the Sermon on the Mount describe that joy which sorrow and pain are powerless to take away. It is a joy that shines through tears, which nothing in life or death can take away.

This blessedness, Jesus told his disciples, comes to humble people—those who are poor in spirit. Theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn—those who have known bitter sorrow... The Arabs have a saying that "All sunshine makes a desert," The land upon which the sun always shines soon becomes an arid place where no fruit will grow. There are certain things that only sorrow can beget. In our moments of sorrow many of us have discovered the kindness of other people and the compassion of Christ as we never knew such things before.

I am reminded of the poem (Don't know who wrote it):

*I walked a mile with Pleasure
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.*

*I walked a mile with sorrow
And never a word said she
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When sorrow walked with me.*

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. What an astonishing thing for Jesus to have said! Most of us believe just the opposite. Those who are strong and aggressive inherit—or subdue—the earth. What other than such a belief would have prompted parliaments and kings, presidents and congresses to spend so much of a nation's treasure on military hardware and personnel?

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness—the people who have a yearning for that which is just and good.

Remember the last line of the Old Testament reading we heard this morning: God “has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8).

Canon Edward West says these blessed ones “Have a profound concern for the welfare of another without any desire to control that other, to be thanked by that other, or to enjoy the process.” Jesus declared that such persons will be filled; they shall be satisfied.

The merciful shall receive mercy.

The pure in heart shall see God.

And the peacemakers –what ever happened to them? If there are any left, they shall be called the sons and daughters of God.

The Lord described blessedness—*makarios*—with such simplicity and grace that there is little more that can be said. However I did learn some new ones that I'd like to share with you:

Blessed are those who can laugh at them selves; they will have endless amusement.

Blessed are those who can tell a mountain from a molehill; they will be spared a lot of trouble.

Blessed are those who can sit quietly and rest awhile with out looking for excuses; they will become wise.

Blessed are those who know how to keep quiet and listen; they will learn new things thereby.

Blessed are those who do not take themselves seriously; they will be appreciated by those around them.

Blessed are you if you can take small things seriously and large things peacefully; you will travel far,

And blessed above all are you if you can recognize Christ in everyone you meet; you will be given true light, true wisdom, and true joy.

This blessedness is not something God will force upon us. It is something that we have the freedom to choose. So today let's give thanks for those men and women who have made good choices and for the ways in which their lives have enriched ours.

Amen.