

November 01, 2020 Sermon  
Matthew 5:1-12

“Tell me your story.” Before I would ever be accepted into Trinity Lutheran Seminary, back some nineteen or twenty years ago, I had to write my story for those who controlled admissions into the school. Asking me to tell my *story*, meant *just that*. They wanted to know *everything* I could tell them about myself from the time I could remember, up to the current time of feeling “the call” to attend seminary.

Telling my story meant including things I didn’t necessarily want to include. It was filled with, as they say, the good, the bad and the ugly. It was also filled with the story of my faith in God in Christ. It told the story of *who* I was, *how* I became *what* I was at that time, and what I expected to gain from some grueling time in seminary, looking even *further* into my most inner self.

I don’t know if part of the plan to tell my story was to see where I needed to make *changes* in myself, or not, but *seeing* your story on paper, after spending *hours* of writing, is a bit eye-opening. Telling your story not only *shows* where you messed up in life, but it also shows how *strong* your belief system is, and *most* importantly, it was a way of seeing where God had been at work in my life, especially when I needed it most.

This draws me to the third chapter of 1st John, the second verse. “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will *be* has not yet been revealed. What we *do* know is this: when he IS revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.”

We *all* know that we are children of God, but think about YOUR story. What IS your story? How did *you* get to where you are *now*, from where you *were*? What will people say at your funeral? Better yet, what do you WANT them to say?

In today’s gospel lesson, we read the words with which we may be all too comfortable. I say that, meaning, *sometimes* we hear things so many times, we don’t necessarily know *why* they give us comfort, and maybe they DON’T give us comfort and maybe they SHOULDNT. Maybe they should challenge us.

Jesus has just finished up with dealing with a crowd of people. He has healed and cured people, and now, is speaking mainly to the disciples, but we are told a crowd is gathering, and so Jesus takes a place of authority up on the mountains, with the disciples close at hand. Jesus begins to teach with a laundry list of “blessed are.”

The Hebrew word for “blessing,” is the word “ashar,” which means, “*to find the right road.*” These beatitudes come AFTER the actions of Jesus, and so he is calling the disciples to activate the kingdom of God. He is calling *them* to go find those people who could use a little help with their faith and their believing. You know...help in finding the right road. The disciples have a story to tell, and this is how they should tell it.

The *story* the disciples tell, will be of the Jesus that transforms lives. The *story* the disciples will tell, will be how they have experienced God in Christ. The presentation of the story may sometimes be to simply *show* and *act* and *be* the presence of Christ to others.

We *know* this scripture well. Some of us may even say this is our favorite part of Matthew or even of the new testament. But what *is* it that *makes* it your *favorite* part? This is a *guide* by which we should live. Is *this* the way we’re living? Do we have enough *faith* to live this way?

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” You are on the right road (to use the Hebrew translation), when you are humble. Boasting about how you gave money to this organization and that, or ANY of the good works you’ve done will *not* get you into the kingdom of heaven. Works aren’t necessary, but DOING good works because we want to **show** the LOVE of God, because we want to be God’s hands and feet in the world is *our* ticket into God’s kingdom.

You are on the right road when you *mourn* for absolutely anything. You **can** mourn *anything*...the loss of a loved one, a job, a friendship, an animal, and you can mourn *with* and *for* others. When we mourn with others or even by ourselves, that means we *care*...we have a heart that loves, and so God’s comfort is there in the sorrow we show. God will *always* grieve with us.

You are on the right road when you are *meek*. This kind of meekness doesn't imply *weakness*, but the ability to help other people achieve what they think is good and right. Meekness is putting yourself *after* others, allowing *others* to have an opinion, and be heard. This is how *goals* are achieved in a non-violent manner and so this is how we inherit God's kingdom on earth.

You are on the right road when *all* of that hungering and thirsting is for the sake of righteousness in the world, and you *act* in a manner that shows the face of Jesus to others. Be *active* in a world that needs clean water and air. Be *respectfully* active in a world that needs *equal justice* for *all* people, because we are ALL children of God, as was mentioned earlier in 1st John. *All* means *all*. Fulfillment will be yours. It will give you a sense of well-being and peace.

You are on the right road when you are *merciful*. Don't we all find that when we *offer* forgiveness to *others*, it's easier to *receive* forgiveness from others? And sometimes, we need to offer forgiveness even when someone hasn't asked for it. That's *true* mercy. *Forgiveness* allows us to move on, but like everything else, it takes faith in action to do that.

You are on the right road when your *heart* is *pure*. You're on the right road when you keep confidences and do not betray the trust of others with idle gossip. When we participate in the ministry of presence and listen without judgment, we are on the right road, and will *surely* see God.

You are on the right road if you're a *peacemaker*. This may be a combination of things. Peacemakers look for justice *and* righteousness. Peacemakers are good listeners and offer the ministry of presence. But peacemakers might *also* have to speak up at times and allow their voices to be heard above the noise of the turmoil surrounding them. Being a peacemaker doesn't necessarily imply one is *quiet*. But we are *assured* that *peacemakers* will be called children of God.

You are on the right road if you are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Doing the *right* thing isn't *always easy*, but *strive* to do the right thing. Don't get pulled into the ideas of others who may not be on the road that leads to the kingdom of God. And while you're at it, pull the other way, and see if you can pull someone over to the side that will allow *us*, as well as THEM to gain the kingdom of heaven.

The one most difficult for *me* to hear is that you are on the right road when people revile and persecute and utter all kinds of evil against me falsely on account of God in Christ. I will say this again...we are ALL children of God. So it is not *ours* to judge others, even according to how we interpret the Bible. The Bible speaks to us in many different ways, but remember when *we* are reading and interpreting, that doesn't make *us* the judge of *anyone* or *anything*.

We were meant to walk in our *own* shoes, but when you're trying on the shoes of someone else, try to cut them some slack. It is not *our* job to judge, but to *love*. It is not *our* job to *hurt*, but to help heal. It is not *our* job to *take* unless we are going to *give*, and so making up our minds about someone ELSE after reading the Bible, probably says more about US than the other person.

But we can rejoice and be glad about our lives lived, no matter what, because our reward will be *great* in heaven. Plenty of people who have come before us were persecuted in the name of Christ. We are here now, and we can try to make a change.

Are we on the right road? When our time finally comes, will others acknowledge us as having been the face of Christ to them?

In 1922, Agnes Gonxha Bojaxhiu was a poor Macedonian twelve-year-old in parochial school. In 1948 she was the principal of a Catholic high school in Calcutta. Who would have known that years later she would be accepting the Nobel Peace Prize as Mother Teresa of Calcutta, or that fourteen years after that Pope John Paul II would beatify her as Saint Teresa?

As we live, our stories get *richer* and *fuller*. God is full of surprises, and as we remember our saints, those stories of God's surprises and the effects they have had on our lives of faith are brought to the forefront. Stay on the right road, by following the call to *activate* the kingdom of God. Rejoice and be glad this day, knowing that our reward is in heaven! Amen.