

Matthew 5.1-12
The Feast of All Saints
1 November 2018, 7:00 p.m.
St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

In this evening's Gospel—in the Beatitudes—we come face to face with the greatest conspiracy ever perpetrated on mankind. The ringleaders of the conspiracy? The world. Your own sinful flesh. And the very devil himself. And the conspiracy? Well, it's actually rather subtle. In fact, it's so subtle that it has pretty much everyone hoodwinked.

It's this: because the saints—you—and the holy Christian Church are such a despicable thing, what you lay claim to cannot possibly be true.

Worse, because the saints and the holy Christian Church are such a despicable thing, the God you worship—the Father who created the world, the Son who redeemed it with His own blood, the Holy Spirit who called you by the Gospel of that redemption through His holy Word and Baptism and has kept you in your Baptism through His Word and Sacrament—that God must be a nothing. And because of that His Word is null. And His promises are void.

Because just look at the Church:

Poor in spirit. Not proud. In fact, nothing to be *proud of!*

Mourning! Not rejoicing.

Meek. Not boastful. In fact, nothing to boast in except the cross of Jesus Christ.

Not righteous. In fact, hungering and thirsting for righteousness.

And merciful? Gimme a break. That's not how you get ahead in this world.

Pure in heart? Yes. And fools for it.

Peacemakers. Yes. And at what cost!

And the crowning glory? What they get for being like this?

Persecution and revilement. The kind of thing reserved for what is bad, evil, despicable.

And that, precisely, is the great conspiracy. The three conspiring together—devil, world, and flesh—to concoct and present a great deception about your very identity. About who you are in Christ.

To bring suffering upon you. And then to tell you that your suffering is for naught.

To bring great distress and mourning into your life. And then to ask you why you're not happy.

To plague your conscience and prove to you your poverty of spirit and to increase—always increase—your hunger and thirst for righteousness, as if you didn't have it in Christ. And then to ask you, "Where did Christ's righteousness get that He promised you?"

To make you suffer for doing good—for acting not for self, but for neighbor out of love—as if to demonstrate the futility of meekness and mercy and peacemaking.

As if they were all saying, “Just look at yourself, man! *That’s* who you are.”

Now *that’s* a conspiracy.

If only it could entangle you in its web.

If only it could finally kill the holy Christian Church. And wipe it off the face of the earth!

If only it could expunge faith in every one of you!

If only it could wrest you from Christ and bring you into the kingdom of the devil! Give the flesh the upper hand! Turn the world’s catechism into the one you read and study!

Last night at the Feast of the Reformation we sang the great Luther hymn, A Mighty Fortress.

In the third verse—well, you know how it goes—“This world’s prince may still scowl fierce. As he will! He can harm us none. He’s judged. The deed is done. One little word can fell him.”

One little word. One little word and the entire conspiracy of devil, world, and flesh is brought to its knees. That’s our confession. Words matter. And especially God’s words. Even “one little Word” from His mouth is more powerful than sin, death, and devil taken together. And more powerful than the great conspiracy.

One little word.

What is that word tonight?

“Blessed.”

Blessed, not because the world tells you so. Blessed, not because your flesh feels that way.
Blessed, not because you have the devil hanging around your neck.

But blessed because the Lord Jesus says so.

Blessed in Him upon whom all these insults were first heaped, and more.

Blessed in Him who was reviled by men, that you might not be reviled by God.

Blessed in Him who made peace for you with God.

Blessed in Him who in meekness left the glory and splendor of His heavenly home to take on your flesh.

Blessed in Him who, though He was rich was made poor, that you might be made rich in Him and in His righteousness and heaven.

Blessed in Him whose righteousness alone can slake you hunger and thirst for it.

Blessed not because you made yourself blessed. But blessed because He has made you blessed.

In that one word, “blessed,” all the shame and poverty and hunger and thirst; all the mourning and suffering of the Christian life—they are all pushed aside. Because in that one word Christ gives Himself to you. And makes you His own.

But even more, that one little word is brought against the conspiracy of devil, world, and flesh. And it unmasks their lying deceit and deceptive lies.

You look at your suffering and mourn. And that’s exactly what they want you to do. But Jesus pronounces you blessed.

You look at your meekness and poverty and lament. And that’s exactly what they want you to do. But Jesus pronounces you blessed.

You suffer persecution and reviling. And that’s exactly what they want you to feel. And it’s *all* they want you to feel. But Jesus declares that you are blessed.

Blessed not because it hurts. But blessed because it marks you as one whom Christ Himself has redeemed by His holy Cross.

And this drives us right to the heart of the Christian faith.

For the Christian faith, is after all, well,..., faith. It’s the substance of things hoped for. And the evidence of things unseen. Because faith doesn’t hold onto what it already has, but what it will get. It clings not to sight and experience, but to words. God’s Words. God’s Words about Christ. God’s Words that preach to you the way things really are—as God sees them. And as God has made them in Christ.

And in Christ, this is God’s word over you: blessed.

It was spoken to you in your Baptism when you were washed of all your sins.

It’s announced to you every Divine Service in the Absolution.

It’s the word put into your very mouth in the Sacrament of the Altar for the forgiveness of all your sins.

Blessed.

Blessed in Christ. Who was made to be sin. For you. That you might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Blessed in Christ. Who suffered cross and death. For you.

Blessed in Christ. Who rose again from the dead. For you.

Blessed in Christ. Who has ascended to heaven, there to plead your cause before the heavenly throne and to prepare a place. For you.

Blessed in Christ. Who will return. And who will at last rescue you, body and soul, from this great conspiracy of devil, world, and flesh arrayed against you.

May the good and gracious Lord keep you in that faith to life everlasting. Amen.

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