

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Matthew 5:1-12

Be Imitators of Christ

- 1. In your attitude toward God**
- 2. In your attitude toward others**

**Hymns: 85 – 415 – Distribution: 92, 312
– Closing 446**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Matthew 5:1-12 –

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying:

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

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

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

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

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

I've always been amazed at the copying that goes on in the "Coke vs. Pepsi" wars.

- In 1983, Coke came out with a new product, Cherry Coke. It took five years, but in 1988 Pepsi introduced a new soda, Pepsi Wild Cherry.
- In 2000 Pepsi came out with a new flavor, Pepsi Twist, with a bit of lemon in it. The next year Coca Cola Lemon rolled off the factory line.
- In 2002 Coca Cola Vanilla was introduced. The next year Pepsi Vanilla came out.
- It's not clear who came out with the lime flavor first, because both Pepsi Lime and Coca Cola Lime were introduced in 2005.
- And finally, in 2006 Coca Cola Black Cherry Vanilla premiered. So in 2007, Pepsi Black Cherry French Vanilla was introduced.

There's an old saying: "Imitation is the highest form of flattery." You know the concept. If a person has an idea that is ingenious, it won't be long before others are doing the same thing.

Copying can be a good thing or a bad thing (Don't try it with schoolwork!). Today we find out in the Scriptures that we have someone we imitate. We copy Jesus. On the basis of these verses from Matthew 5, called the Beatitudes, let us be encouraged to "**Be Imitators of Christ!**" We will see that we imitate him:

- 1. In our attitude toward God**
- 2. In our attitude toward others**

1. In our attitude toward God

Before we dig too deep into these verses, we have to get one thing straight. We do not imitate Christ in order to earn God's favor or forgiveness. We do not do it so we can pay our way to heaven or "get right" with God. Romans 3 tells us, "*No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.*"

We need to hear this for two reasons. First, because our world operates on the premise of "You get what you earn." It's quite ingrained

into us! Secondly, some religions have incorporated this thought, called “work righteousness,” into their teachings. As we look at the way we imitate Christ, remember that what we do in our Christian behavior is a response of love and thanks for Christ already winning our salvation by his death and resurrection!

In what way can we imitate our Savior? We read, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”* If we were to characterize Jesus’ attitude toward his heavenly Father, a word that would fit it well is “submission.” How many times don’t we hear Jesus say that he came to do the will of his heavenly Father, or that he spoke the words that his heavenly Father gave him.

We also submit to our heavenly Father as Christ did. Yet our submission before him must go a significant step farther. Let’s look at some of the key words in these verses as to our attitude toward God:

- *“Blessed are the poor in spirit”* – The word “poor” here is a vivid word. Literally it has the meaning of being a beggar, or being destitute, of being dependant on others for your life.

The thought here is not that a person is financially destitute. The Bible never describes poverty as being a virtue. It never commends anyone for taking a vow of poverty. Rather, this is the person who feels spiritually poor. He feels the same as the tax collector in the famous story Jesus told called “The Pharisee and the Tax Collector.” He felt spiritually empty on his own merits. He could only say, “God have mercy on me a sinner.”

The words of “Rock of Ages” come to mind:

**Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to your cross I cling**

**Naked come to you for dress
Helpless look to you for grace
Foul, I to the fountain fly
Wash me Savior or I die**

- *“Blessed are those who mourn”* – This is indeed the word for feeling grief and sadness because of a death. Why would a person spiritually feel the need for mourning? Two reasons:
 - They recognize that their sin gives them a reason to mourn. They realize their guilt and shortcomings. They realize that there was a death! They are spiritually dead and separated from God by their sin.
 - They also see the results of sin in the world around them. They mourn over the ruined attitudes of mankind. We hear about incidents in the news like school shootings and terror attacks, and we mourn along with others who hurt because of a sinful action.
- *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”* – Jesus uses these literal words for being physically hungry and thirsty to teach a spiritual truth about our emptiness. Since we cannot fulfill our spiritual needs and win our salvation, how blessed we are when we see our need for a Savior and hunger for what he can give! How blessed we are when God gives us the feeling that there’s “something more” to life than getting up and going to work, than building up wealth, than going through the “circle of life.” How blessed we are when God prepares us to receive what he has to give.

How tragic if we do not have these spiritual attitudes toward God! The opposite attitude is what we call “humanism” or “rationalism,” making man the “measure of all things.” Listen to some quotes that express this:

- “God helps those who help themselves.”
- “I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul.”
- “Men have never fully used [their] powers to advance the good in life, because they have waited upon some power external to themselves and to nature to do the work they are responsible for doing.”
- “To love one-self is the beginning of a lifelong romance.”
- “It doesn’t matter who you are, where you came from. The ability to triumph begins with you. ALWAYS.”

Thank the Lord that he leads us to a proper realization that we are poor, hungering, and thirsting, for then he has wonderful news for us! Jesus quoted Isaiah 61 in speaking about his mission in coming to earth: *“The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners... to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”*

What wonderful, beautiful news there is for those who hunger and thirst! We can be filled and comforted with the forgiveness of sins that Jesus Christ won for us. We can be assured that our sin was paid for by his suffering and death on the cross. John wrote in his first letter, *“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

We have “living water” for our thirst. We have comfort from our mourning. How “blessed” we are!

2. In our attitude toward others

Our Savior teaches us one other aspect of a Christian’s attitude in these verses. Not only do we learn about our attitude toward God, we also learn about our attitude toward other people: *“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth... Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”*

Once again, there are key words that we need to recognize in this section:

- *“Blessed are the meek”* – The meanings behind this Greek word are many –
 - Considerate
 - Humble
 - Gentle
 - Unassuming
 - Mild
 - Pleasant

This feeling might cause you to let the lady at the grocery store with two items go first before you wheel your full cart into the checkout.

- *“Blessed are the merciful”* – The meaning here is to have pity on someone in dire circumstances and to be moved to help them. This word is a good reminder that believers in Jesus have a concern for other people’s physical welfare as well as their spiritual welfare.

One way that our Wisconsin Synod remembers this is by operating a ministry called WELS Christian Aid and Relief. This agency of ours has two emphases: To provide humanitarian aid to poverty stricken areas, and to provide disaster relief after storms and disasters.

- *“Blessed are the pure in heart”* – The literal word here is “clean.” This person has no ulterior motives and no selfishness in their actions toward others. They are sincere.

- “*Peacemakers*” – Note that this word isn’t saying that a Christian just likes or enjoys peace, but that he makes peace. This person actively tries to keep peace and Christian harmony in the family and with those around him! It reminds us of Hebrews 12, which says, “*Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*”

How ugly life can be when people display the opposites of these godly words! How ugly when instead of meekness people continually demand that “my rights” be fulfilled. How sad when instead of mercy being shown, stinginess and apathy are evident. How unfortunate when instead of a person being pure in their motives, people manipulate and trick and cheat others. How sad when instead of peacemakers in the family there are troublemakers. How sad when instead of keeping the peace, we have the tendency to lose our temper at the office or in the home.

To make it worse, we often see how the world, and maybe ourselves, promote the way we picture what it means to be “a grownup.” Being grown up is often portrayed as inflicting MY WILL over and above other people’s wills and feelings. Sometimes we see ideas in what it means to be grown up in the following:

- Beating the car next to me out when the light turns green
- Playing your stereo so loud in the car that everyone at the intersection at a red light can hear “my music”
- Doing the opposite of what authority tells me to do
- Pepperizing my speech with foul, but grown up, words
- Being able to hold your liquor
- Having everything in the garage (and more) than my neighbor has
- Making the class laugh and making the teacher mad
- Wearing makeup
- Being first

What does it mean to be a mature Christian? It means displaying the other words that we’ve learned today from Matthew 5!

I saw a good illustration of this not long ago in a bicycle tire. Maybe you have a few tires like this around your garage. Bicycle tires have spokes on them that are all connected to the center. It’s a balanced tire and a strong tire. It all radiates from the middle of it. In the same way, Christians are held together and motivated by the person that is at the center of their life: Christ! Every act that they do is motivated by what he has done. Every word they say imitates their loving Savior. Every thought they have radiates from who he is to them. They live a balanced life in the love of the One who loved them first. Other types of spokes just don’t fit in the picture.

Finally, when a person reads verses like these, he often is moved to despair. The reason is that we know that we have not followed these attitudes and actions or lived up to the name of our Savior. As we hear these teachings of Jesus today about our attitude toward God and toward our fellow man, may we repent of our past shortcomings in our rebellious attitudes toward God. May we also repent of the selfish attitudes that have kept us from showing mercy or being a peacemaker. And then may we see the love of Jesus that caused him to come to this world as your Savior and to pay for those sins by his death on the cross.

Now, as we leave church today, may we be inspired to go out and to follow his ways, expressed in the Beatitudes and his Word! May the Lord cause us to imitate Christ. And may the Lord give us a blessed life as we do! Amen.