



1616 W. Mequon Road, Mequon WI 53092  
(262)241-3121 [www.stjohnsmequon.org](http://www.stjohnsmequon.org)  
Email: [office@stjohnsmequon.org](mailto:office@stjohnsmequon.org)  
**Pastor James Tiefel**  
**(262) 853-9723 (cell#)**  
Email: [pastortiefel@gmail.com](mailto:pastortiefel@gmail.com)

---

## **The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany**

### **January 29, 2023**

#### **Jesus Brings Blessings to Those who Follow Him in Faith**

In the famous Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus turns the world upside down. He calls people *blessed* whom the world considers losers and doormats. Jesus teaches us that humility and weakness are part of faith and enable us to focus entirely on Christ. This is the way God loves to work: Weakness here and now gains eternal blessings in the world to come.

#### **Sermon** **Matthew 5:1-12**

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

**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 children 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.**

Introduction: There is no glory in surrender. Losing is bad enough, but surrendering is worse. Two football teams are going to lose championship games this afternoon, but they won't surrender. If you lose, you are defeated; if you surrender, you give up. There is no glory in raising the white flag. The emperor of Japan sent insignificant underlings to surrender to MacArthur at end of World War II. Adolf Hitler committed suicide rather than surrender to the Russians. Some may not consider the end of the war in Vietnam to have been a surrender but

the images of the last helicopter flights out of Saigon still shame many Americans. There is no glory in giving up. Winston Churchill thundered to the British people "We will never surrender."

The Gospel for today is Jesus' introduction to what we call the Sermon on the Mount. A year had passed since Jesus was baptized and began his ministry. He had introduced himself in Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. In all three places he preached and taught and healed. He was attracting big crowds and even more he was attracting followers. By this time there was a solid core of people who had become convinced that he was the one the Lord had promised to send as Messiah.

One day when the crowds were especially thick, Matthew tells us that Jesus **went up on a mountain side and sat down**. And then Matthew wrote: **His disciples came to him and he began to teach them**. The lessons Jesus taught that day weren't aimed at the curious but at the committed. Jesus was talking to people who were following him because they believed in him. What he said led them to understand what following him would mean. Jesus identified eight qualities or attitudes that come with faith in him. Whether you take these eight qualities separately or as a group, they really do seem to be surrender. They describe believers as people who give themselves up. They give up their self-interest and they hand themselves over to God. You might say that Christians wave the white flag that comes with faith.

There is no glory in surrender. That's what people think. Whether in war or in life, giving up is no good. Giving up is what weak people do, hopeless people, conquered people. What people think often influences us. We aren't always willing to give up our self-interest, not always ready to carry the white flag of surrender. We think twice; we hesitate; we double clutch. And so in these very familiar words called the Beatitudes, Jesus points out to us and he promises that believers live by losing; that we gain by giving. In other words, we **TRIUMPH IN SURRENDER**.

So what are these qualities? Jesus began with three: to be **poor in spirit**, to **mourn**, and to be **meek**. Some people see nothing more in these qualities than human traits: people who live in deep poverty, people who mourn because of personal tragedy, people who are meek because they can't defend themselves. But unbelievers can have these characteristics, too, and Jesus isn't talking to unbelievers. There's more here. Believers are **poor in spirit** because they come to God with absolute and abject poverty. We can't lift a finger or contribute a red cent to get ourselves right with God or to gain his love. As believers we learn to **mourn** over our sins and the sins we see around us. We see sins as so appalling and ugly we always come running to Jesus for help. We are **meek** not because we are timid or weak but because we are humble and convinced that God's way is the best way. To be poor in spirit, to mourn, and to be meek is how we approach God. We say, "Nothing in my hands I bring; simply to thy cross I cling."

In this relationship with Jesus, believers **hunger and thirst for righteousness**. We long for the righteousness of Jesus which covers our sins. We also long for the right living that Jesus teaches us and demonstrates to us. We never achieve perfection like he did, but we strive to be more like Jesus every day. In the same way Jesus was filled with compassion for people, his children are **merciful**. They fight against holding grudges and getting even, they work at forgiving people who do them wrong. Just as Jesus never had a sinful thought or an evil idea, so his children are **pure in heart**. They strive to keep their focus on good and godly things instead of things that are indecent and perverse. In the same way that Jesus broke down the barriers that separated people from God, so his children are **peacemakers**. They strive to overcome racism and prejudice. They work at getting along with the people around them. When we live and love as Jesus' disciples, we may find that Jesus' enemies hate us for it. They may **persecute** us and **insult us and falsely say all kinds of evil against us because of Jesus**. We may not lose our lives like Christians in China or Iran, but we may lose a job or a grade or a raise or a friend. Sometimes being with Jesus includes carrying Jesus' cross.

The truth is that life with Jesus is a life of surrender. We surrender our pride, we surrender our self-interest—we may even surrender our safety. Everyone knows that no one gets ahead in our world by taking a back seat. We don't get to the head of the class by concerning ourselves with the class ahead of us. But that's exactly what happens when we walk with Jesus. Some may consider us to have self-doubts or low self-esteem. Some may decide we're naïve or weak or timid or gutless or even stupid.

Right here is where Jesus turns everything upside down. What most people consider stupid, Jesus calls wise. What others think is the worst of the worst, Jesus calls the best of the best. Qualities the world disdains Jesus exalts. The world's idea of a curse Jesus calls **Blessed**. **Blessed are they**, Jesus said; **Blessed are you**, Jesus says. In the Bible's language blessed people are confident people who are content in faith. Blessed people are happy people because they live with God and live in love with other people. Blessed people are people who see the present with the future in sight. And blessed people are people who see that there is **triumph in surrender**.

**Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs the kingdom of heaven.** What comes with their humility before God is the glory of God to be revealed. **Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.** Their agony over evil will be removed as evil is destroyed at the end of time. **Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.** Their giving in to God includes God giving everything to them. **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.** The righteousness of Christ covers every sin and they are filled to the brim with deeds of love and service. **Blessed are the merciful for they will be shown mercy.** The compassion the believers feel for others is nothing more than a reflection of the compassion God has for them. **Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.** Purity that invades the depths of our intellect and emotion enables us to enjoy the purity of God as others cannot and it anticipates seeing God face to face in the throne room of heaven. **Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.** Those who overcome evil with good as they bring peace to strife are fulfilling their roles as members of God's family. And persecution, the deepest and most drastic act of the believer's surrender? In death, Jesus says, **they inherit the kingdom of heaven.**

There is no glory in surrender. Nothing good can come from giving up. Society is sure of that. Society thunders "We will never surrender." But Christians do surrender. We give ourselves up to God and our neighbor. We deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Jesus. But in that surrender, we find confidence, contentment, happiness, and a clear vision of heaven. Our surrender and **our suffering are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed.** We embrace that surrender, we strive to strengthen it, we do not turn away from it and we live in love with Jesus and one another. And we pray this:

To the triumph of your cross summon all the living;  
Summon us to live by loss, gaining all by giving.  
Suffering all that we may see triumph in surrender;  
Leaving all that we may be partners in your splendor. Amen.