

1/30/2011

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY Almighty and Everlasting God, your goodness endures forever so we ask that through lifes trielas we may always see and be encouraged in faith by your blessings; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

“Growing in God’s Grace”

THE OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Micah 6:1-8

(*Micah calls God’s people to repentance, justice, mercy, and humility.*)

1 Listen to what the LORD says: "Stand up, plead your case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. 2 Hear, O mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the LORD has a case against his people; he is lodging a charge against Israel. 3 "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. 4 I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. 5 My people, remember what Balak king of Moab counseled and what Balaam son of Beor answered. Remember *your journey* from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD."

6 With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

8 He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

THE EPISTLE LESSON 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

(*God’s ways of working, through the cross, is considered foolishness by the world.*)

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." 20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. 26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the

lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him.

30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

THE GOSPEL LESSON Matthew 5:1-12

(In "the Beatitudes" Jesus shares how all are blessed by God, even in hardship.)

1 Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In the early 1840's a Lutheran Pastor became very ill. His name was C.F.W. Walther. He was bed bound for almost 2 years. This was a problem. He was pastor of a number of churches whom he felt needed their pastor. And, at the same time the church was going through serious trouble. However, during this time he had an opportunity for study. He studied God's word, he read through Luther's works. He grew in faith and knowledge that helped him later to lead the church. He later became the first president of the LCMS, our denomination, and was a leader in American Christianity in the 1800's. His misfortune, his illness, by the grace of God turned into fortune and blessing.

Isn't it amazing how God can take the bad and use it for good for his children.

St. Paul said the same thing. One of my favorite chapters in the Bible is 2 Corinthians 1. In verses 8 - 10 Paul wrote about hardships. **8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,** The hardships of Paul worked for good. They helped him to realize there was a limit to His ability, and reminded him of what He should have known and taught him again, that we have to rely on God in this life and eternally.

That is the message of today's Gospel lesson. This section of Scripture is often called "The Beatitudes," because each verse starts with the word, "Blessed." But look who Jesus says are blessed.

- The blessed people are those who are poor in spirit, or humble.
- The blessed people are those who mourn, or lost loved ones.
- The blessed are those who are not proud and arrogant, but meek and gentle.
- The blessed are those who hunger for something that is very hard to find in this world, righteousness.
- The blessed are those who rather than being stubborn and hard, are merciful.
- The blessed are not those who Live life for all they can, but instead serve God by being pure in heart.
- The blessed are not the victors, but the peacemakers.
- The blessed are those who are persecuted and spoken of in an evil way.

No one in this world wants this kind of treatment in life. But, in our lesson Jesus says blessings come from hardship, that He is changing our lives for good.

This all happens because of Jesus. The worst thing that could ever happen is that God, the creator and ruler of all things, would die. But God died in Jesus, to pay for our sins, to give us God's love, to give eternal life to all who believe in Jesus. When humility, or mourning, or persecution, or any evil or trouble overtakes us, God's love is there. He will see us through hardship, persecution, even death because of His love for us in Jesus. In Jesus, God turns our hardships into blessings.

This verse is part of the sermon on the mount. This whole section tells of how God changes our lives in Jesus. The lives of Christians are uniquely different from those of the people around us who don't know the Lord. When we know God changes bad into good, we have a different attitude toward life. We can even face trouble as Jesus says, "Rejoicing and being glad."

You all know that one of these 'Beatitude' verses applies directly to me. My mom died recently and her funeral was last Monday. I am mourning, but because of Jesus I am comforted, I am blessed. First, I know my mom is in heaven. But I'm blessed for another reason. For 32 years I have served as a pastor. I have tried to teach God's Word and help others and love others. Maybe I forgot in some ways what it is like, not just to care, but to be cared for. But, in my mother's illness I had people asking to pray for me. I had people helping me to get to Florida. I had e-mails and cards of well wishes from church members all over the country. I learned again what I maybe already knew, and what I should have known, that as fellow children of God we are family and share Jesus' love with one another. Do you see how in my morning I have been comforted? Don't you see how God works? "Blessed even are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." We can face our trials with new attitudes and changed lives, knowing that even in life's hardships, because of Jesus, we are blessed!