

SAINT THOMAS CHURCH

Fifth Avenue · New York City

Sunday, April 30, 2023

The Fourth Sunday of Easter (Good Shepherd Sunday)

Festal Evensong

4 p.m.

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A Sermon by

The Rev. Mark Schultz, *Associate for Pastoral Care*

on

Matthew 5:11

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**Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil
against you falsely on my account**

In the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

How Blissful you when they reproach you and persecute you and falsely accuse. You of every evil for my sake. Rejoice and be glad for your reward in. The heavens is great for thus they persecuted the prophets before you.

How Blissful you when they reproach you. love David Bentley Hearts, self-described pitilessly literal translation of the New Testament because regardless of the real accuracy of the description pitilessly literal after all one person's pitilessly literal is another's, editorially heavy-handed.

His translation, choices tend to be audacious and thought-provoking. How Blissful you when they reproach you. I think there's a salutary Dimension to this choice.

How often for instance, when we think of blessedness do we think of an abstract concept? how often do you imagine that blessedness is a kind of intangible spiritual quality or condition which may adhere to us, or obtain for us in some higher realm, but that affects us very little in this one, Or how often do we say? We're blessed.

When we pause to consider our resources or the Privileges, we've enjoyed often, moved to gratitude for them. But the sense of what a blessing is remains tied to propitious circumstances, external to us.

Blissful though, is another story.

Blissful has a sense of something that arises fromwithin us, something profoundly rooted in us. Something that isn't dependent on external circumstances, or even passing and changeable emotions, however, positive or negative, they may be Blissful has something about it. That is expressed through us from the depths of our being and that rises to meet the changes and chances of Any Given hour. Blissful suggests a kind of deep down incomprehensible joy that because it is ecstatic, moves us outside the given moment, whatever it may look like. To something greater more lasting more, beautiful more good. Something we might call with Eliot The Still Point of the turning world. And Blissful reveals that still point that greater lasting beautiful goodness. That is available to us whatever the weather. However, favorable or unfavorable our current circumstances, maybe now, all of this can be said of blessedness as well. In fact, it ought to when we bless anything or anyone, we don't so much, add some intangible or numinous abstract quality to what were blessing so much as we're emphatically pointing to the intangible and numinous realities already present already available to it and to us, The

blessing suggesting indeed. Insisting that, whatever is blast ought to be seen as a window onto the very depths of the capital, our reality of love from which it's very being is derived.

In this way, we can put to rest any suggestion that in the Beatitudes, our Lord is urging us to look on the bright side when we're reviled or morning or persecuted. And we can put to rest any notion that Jesus is, suggesting that were made the recipients of more Divine favor, the more unhappy were made to be. Instead. Our good and gentle Lord. Jesus is revealing to us something about the nature of the Timeless and eternal reality of love with, which we are constantly called to be in relationship. As well as the conditions under which that reality is made known in a fallen world that has departed from its pattern.

In other words, the Beatitudes don't tell us. Good job for morning you'll get a reward or you've got God's attention and being persecuted. Just wait a bit and things will get better. Or house. Well, that you hunger and thirst for righteousness. You keep doing that things will turn out. The Beatitudes show us. In a world filled with Injustice, Brokenness and sin, your hunger and thirst for righteousness, is a window onto the reality of God's own life and are themselves a sign that, that life is yearning in, you Desiring in you living in, you revealing in you, the Feast of righteousness that will never come up short in a world filled with death and despair.

Your morning is a window onto the desire of God, the death and despair no longer have the last word. The Horizon of a reality of joy that can burst forth in you and from you, And make of your very life. The dawning of God's Own healing and comfort. So given this context, given that the Beatitudes reveal to us, something of the pattern of that Capital, our reality that is God's life that undergirds all things.

Given that context, the beatitude were considering this evening sums. It all up. Pitches us towards evangelism.

So, it's worth noting that this Final beatitude in Matthew 5, how Blissful you, when they reproach you and persecute you and falsely accuse, you of every evil for my sake rejoice and be glad for your reward in. The heavens is great for. Thus they persecuted the prophets before you. It's worth noting that this be attitude is really incomprehensible. Without referring to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20, go there for instruct, all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the father, and of the son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything that I have commanded, you and see. I am with you every day until the consummation of the age. The beatitude immediately before this final one has to do with being persecuted for the sake of what is right. But this last beatitude given directly to us. Not a blessed are those who? But a blessed are you has to do with the consequences of fulfilling this Commission of bearing witness to the pattern of love, the pattern of Jesus Christ alive in a world hostile to it. And it should go without saying. That we are not blazing ecstatic signs of the blissfulness of God's very life. When we say the right things about Jesus in order to make people uncomfortable.

When we wield our own righteousness, as a weapon. When we Delight in the wrongness of others. When we speak hard truth to others, not because it is necessary to do so and can be done with kindness, but because we must prove our rectitude our virtue over against them, and they must suffer. No. We become the Blazing ecstatic signs of the blissfulness of God's very life when we bear witness in our very own lives their shape, their conduct not merely in word but also in deed to the kingdom of love, that is coming to be in Christ through the church. The new family of God in which all are welcomed in and through baptism. the revulsion may, we may experience on account of our witness is not something our Lord insists we like or desire, let alone Revel in but a participation in his own suffering, his own pattern Which he endured, not for the sake of the experience of the pain. But for the joy of the Redemption, he was working out on our behalf as a gift of Grace to us his own persecutors. A gift that means the end of death and sin and the joy of the Resurrection Life. In other words,

our final beatitude can be heard as something like this.

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Blessed. Are you Blissful? Are you? If in the midst of this present, Darkness, That will persecute you and revile you and accuse you of all sorts of terrible things. You can receive Grace to stand up for the good, the true, the beautiful that has been rejected or scapegoated and that looks like Jesus Christ.

And you yourself can be a living doorway on to the Blessed blissfulness of that. Beautiful and true goodness.

What's more? You Are Not Alone. You stand with the prophets before you and with the persecuted in your own time and indeed with Jesus Christ who stands with you.

So rejoice in The Fellowship of the Saints, which is Excel itself in exuberant manifestation of God's own life of joy. And you will discover that this Joy this reality of bliss is immediately available to you. to fulfill you to support you to live in you to be you however dark or difficult or indeed fair or favorable the present passing circumstances, maybe

the blissfulness of the life of God alive in us.

We are called today. To Bear witness to

Let us answer that call. And let us do so

not thinking that were called to choose rejection or revulsion, or objection or sorrow or pain.

That acknowledging that the pattern of the Bliss of God's love. Has itself been rejected reviled, objected grieved persecuted, and oppressed, even by us in our sin. Let us by Grace, choose the blissfulness of that love. To witness to it in our own lives, not counting the cost. Knowing that the reality of that Bliss is greater than any sorrow more persistent than any grief more enduring than any of this life's changes or chances. And that it has already chosen us to be the sites of its own blessedness to set every Darkness. Ablaze with love Zone, Fierce Glory.

How Blissful are you? if you answer this call,

In the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.