



Getting To See God

Matthew 5:1-10

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All Saints Sunday

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Matthew 5:8

Prayer for Illumination (before Scripture reading)

Lord, break the bread of your Word among us and nourish us with your truth. In the name of Christ Jesus we pray. Amen

Matthew’s version of the Beatitudes is featured prominently in the Monty Python movie, “The Life of Brian.” Brian, a contemporary of Jesus in the movie, is standing on the edge of the crowd with his mother when Jesus delivers the sermon which begins the Beatitudes. Of course, at the edge of the crowd, it is hard to make out what a speaker is saying. The speech is half heard, half passed from person to person, and just trying to get the speaker’s words takes up all the energy of the listeners.

“What was that?” says a man in the crowd.

“I think it was, ‘Blessed are the cheese makers’” responds someone further forward.

“What’s so special about the cheese makers?”

A cultured type nearby chimes in: “It’s not meant to be taken literally. Obviously, it refers to any manufacturers of dairy products.”

The question for us this morning is, have we heard Jesus any more clearly than Brian and the others have? Here we are, back in church again, listening to another story about and some of the words of, Jesus Christ. Do we wonder how these words of Jesus can help us to serve God as they helped the saints we celebrate today? As someone asked, “How do we live the Christian life, anyway?” It’s a good question.

Today is All Saints Sunday. It is the day we remember those, especially, who have gone before us in the faith, and are now with the Lord. Thinking about this theme while reading through the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount, I came to focus on verse 8. The verse declares that it is the “pure in heart” who “shall see God”, who shall walk with, and know God. If that is so, who are the “pure in heart”, what are they like, and how can we be counted among them?

The word here translated “pure” in the original Greek means ‘clean’ at its simplest. Looking at uses of it, however, we discover

it refers to wheat that is unmixed with chaff, and milk that has not been diluted with water. With this background, listen to these renderings of verse 8. From the Message, “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.” And William Barclay used these words: “Blessed is the one whose motives are always entirely unmixed, for that one shall see God.”

Unmixed motives? Which of us can dare to make such a claim? Who is it with a mind so clear that she never notices the effect her actions have on others? The simplicity of unmixed motives would seem beyond our ability.

A story might help us see the point:

A mother approached a teacher for assistance with a domestic matter. “My son has horrible eating habits,” she said.

“Please, he looks up to you, and he will listen to you if you tell him to stop eating foods with so much sugar.”

The teacher listened sympathetically, “I ask that you come back next week and make the request again.”

The mother agreed and returned seven days later. “My son’s problem continues,” she said. “I am very concerned about his health. He rarely eats vegetables or fruits. Please, won’t you talk to him about the danger of eating too much sugar?”

“Please come back and see me in a week,” the teacher said simply.

Though the mother was disappointed, she left and returned one week later. Once again she made her plea. This time the teacher agreed to talk with her son. “I am grateful that you will take the time to talk to him”, said the mother, “but I don’t understand why it took my asking you three times before you would do it.”

The teacher looked at the woman and said, “I didn’t realize how hard it would be for me to give up sugar!”

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

How often does the physician counsel exercise, only to neglect it him or herself? How about the pastor who encourages the importance of reading the Bible daily, only to neglect it her or himself? What is the best advice we can give each other: “Do as I say, not as I do”?

Not so the teacher in the story. He chose to take his own advice before he could give it in good faith. Such simple honesty – such transparent, unassuming purity – is a rare commodity in our day. But it is possible for us. It is made possible by Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. Because Christ died, we are freed from doing the right thing for the wrong reason. Our forgiveness and salvation is a free gift of God in Jesus.

That means that our good deeds are not attempts to gain God’s favor. No! Our good deeds are a kind of thank you to God. We do caring things for their own sake, or even just to be nice to a person God loves as much as God loves you and me.

And such love is how we like to remember the saints; our beloved grandparents, parents, sisters, brothers, loved ones, special friends, those such as the ones named in our parade today, who have gone before. Those who now see God.

On this All Saints Sunday, let us resolve to be a bit purer in heart, not to earn our look at God, but to thank God we already have it assured through Jesus Christ our Lord.

With the saints of God from every age, we seek to keep our eyes on Jesus, and we break the bread and drink the cup as a seal of the promise:

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Once again, let us come to the Table of our Lord.

AMEN...and So Be It...in my life, and in yours.