

Sermon on Matthew 5:3 by Rev W Huizinga

Liturgy - morning

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| Votum and Salutation | Hymn 19:1,2 |
| The Ten Words of the Covenant | Psalm 85:3,4 |
| Prayer for the Opening of God's Word | |
| Thankoffering | Psalm 34:1,2,7 |
| Read | Matthew 4:12-5:12 Luke 6:17-26 |
| Text | Matthew 5:3 |
| Sermon | |

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

- 1. The poor in spirit are blessed.***
- 2. You must be poor in spirit.***
- 3. Thus the kingdom of heaven is yours.***

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| Response to God's Word | Hymn 11:2,3 |
| Pastoral Prayer | Psalm 1:1 |
| Benediction | |

Points to Ponder

1. What is the setting for the Sermon on the Mount?
2. What does the term, *blessed*, mean? What breeds true and lasting happiness? What other pursuits of happiness do you see in this life?
3. Several explanations of poor in spirit seem possible. Are these literal beggars, like begging monks? Are they the oppressed and poor masses? Are they persons who have poor esteem or are depressed?
4. Are the *poor in spirit*, in whom the Spirit dwells, unable to do anything useful in life? What does this Sermon ask of such persons?
5. Explain *the kingdom of heaven*.
6. How can you enter the kingdom of heaven?
7. What have you learned from this Beatitude about being a living member of the church?

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Were you a living member of the church in the past year?

Sometimes the consistory receives complaints, from younger as well as from older persons, that they find it hard to receive good help and support from a living member of the church of their own age. We discussed this at a congregational meeting.

We want to continue that theme in the preaching and in the home-visiting in 2010 D.V.

Thus we turn to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount where Jesus describes a true and living citizen in God's kingdom. At the same time Jesus pronounces his blessing upon such citizens, such members of the church.

Jesus surprisingly begins his instruction with terms about being blessed. They may enjoy the kingdom of heaven. Only such enter the kingdom of heaven, as Jesus puts it. Such belong to the church of Christ. Those who do not exhibit these qualities are not living members of the church. They need to change, to open their lives to the work of Jesus' Spirit.

For only such who display these qualities receive the promise of the kingdom of heaven. What a prospect to look forward to!

Jesus holds out the true blessing each saint here on earth wants and needs. I preach to you the Word of our chief Prophet under this THEME:

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

- 1. The poor in spirit are blessed.***
- 2. You must be poor in spirit.***
- 3. Thus the kingdom of heaven is yours.***

1. The poor in spirit are blessed.

Jesus' ministry has started. As Jesus hears that Herod Antipas, the fox, places John the Baptist in prison, Jesus embarks on his ministry. Crowds not only came to hear John preach and to be baptised, but more came when Jesus began to preach and teach. We read how Jesus preaches as John did: *repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. Jesus announces that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand*. Jesus teaches in the synagogues about the good news of the kingdom. He heals all manner of disease. We read how multitudes gathered from all over Galilee, from the area of the ten cities, from Jerusalem, from Judea, from the area on the other side of the Jordan, and even from Tyre and Sidon, gentile cities.

In Luke's gospel we read how Jesus appoints his twelve disciples first. Instead of finding them at the temple among the leaders – the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus appoints them from the common tradesmen, the fishermen and a tax-collector. So a council of twelve men from the 12 tribes surrounds Jesus.

You start to see how Jesus has a plan, a blueprint, for his ministry.

Where does He take them? To the mountain!? Not to a local synagogue where boys receive training from rabbis to become spiritual leaders! Many would expect this. Not to the temple area in Jerusalem, where priests lead the people. Most would expect this. Do you expect leaders from the wharves of Fremantle?

Do you not expect your ministers to come from places such as the Theological College of Hamilton? Of course! You insist on it. What a departure from the norm!

As with John the Baptist, Jesus has his own agenda. Here in Galilee by the Sea of Galilee lies a mountain, probably on the northeast side of the sea, facing Capernaum. He takes the swelling crowds here. I am told this high place has wonderful acoustics. Sitting at the bottom of the mount with the multitudes sitting on the slopes, Jesus could reach the multitudes with his authoritative teachings.

Here at the mountain, where we often find Jesus with his disciples, Jesus also prepares himself for a very important meeting. All night long He prays with his Father. All night! Jesus has an important preaching engagement. He must prepare.

Then He takes the followers towards the mount.

Here He *opens his mouth to teach them*. This solemn, classic expression used in Aramaic, describes the task of a prophet and rabbi. Jesus differs from them.

Jesus is the great Lawgiver. His preaching consists not in quoting texts and the comments of other rabbis. Jesus has his own authoritative style – *truly, truly I say to you*. Jesus speaks with his own authority as the Son of God who has come in the flesh.

Fine, but what does this say to me, you ask.

Do these words apply to you? Maybe this question surprises you. Of course it does, you say. It stands written in the Scriptures, does it not?

Yet many think these words are specifically directed toward his **Jewish** disciples only. Or take the views of Dispensationalists, who think this sermon applies not to our time but to the time of the millennium, the 1000 year reign of Jesus when everything is perfect.

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, these ideas are wrong. Jesus spoke to all the multitudes. He waited till the crowds swelled and then the time was ripe. After Pentecost Jesus speaks to you as well.

Do you remember how, after Jesus rose from the dead, Jesus met his apostles at this same mountain where He had given them his teachings and commandments (Mt 28:16-20). There at the same mount Jesus then tells his apostles to go out to the whole world to preach the good news of the kingdom and *to teach them to observe all that I have instructed you*. So take all these instructions to the whole world! It certainly does apply to you and to me.

Jesus opens his remarkable teachings with these declarations of **blessing**. We call them beatitudes, after the Latin term, *beatus*.

Note whom Jesus calls blessed. Jesus pronounced blessed all those who practised these qualities. Some might come from the hated group of tax-collector or from other sinners.

The scribes and Pharisees would point to those who strictly keep all the laws of Moses, especially as explained further in the rules and regulations of the elders. All their legal casuistry, all the rules and regulations deduced from the laws of Moses! The crowds who know not *the law* and who pay no attention to the teachings of the scribes and elders are cursed!

A different teaching echoes up the mount here in Galilee.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. Some think this means **happy** are the poor in spirit. Yet many are happy even though they reject our Lord Jesus Christ. From

the pacific isles we get that mesmerising song, *don't worry, be happy; don't worry, be happy*. Many happily pursue their own pipe-dreams. Is Jesus the only Teacher who can make you happy? Yes, truly and with lasting happiness! Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, *blessed* refers to the status you have before God. God declares you *blessed*. Jesus approves you as one who has God's blessing. This makes you happy. You are truly happy. Others might seem happy but it is a morning mist that soon disappears. God declared Job *blessed* even though Job suffered. God declared his own Son *blessed* even though He died on the accursed cross. Jesus *blessed* Paul even though men stoned him, shipwrecked him or threw him out. To be *blessed* is a state and a status before God. No matter in what situation you find yourself, God approves you. God looks down from heaven and is on your side to help you.

Our brothers and sisters in the Great Reformation gave their bodies to be killed. Yet Jesus declares them *blessed*. They inherit much more than they surrendered here on earth. God approves them. Some of the beatitudes even refer to the blessing of being persecuted!

Think of Psalm 1, the psalm of the two ways. The righteous man delights in the covenant teachings of God. He meditates on them. God blesses this person. He is a green tree besides the streams of water. In all he does, God blesses him. Surely you envy and congratulate such a person.

Yes, if God blesses you, you stand right before God. You can be happy, truly happy. But who is *blessed*?

2. You must be poor in spirit.

Jesus here announces the character of the citizens who may enter the kingdom of heaven. All these characteristics in the beatitudes should be seen together. Together they form your character as a christian, a follower of Jesus, as a living member of his church.

Please do not mistake these beatitudes as though it reads, *blessed are those who inherit the kingdom of heaven*, or *blessed are those who shall see God*. Jesus does not pronounce a blessing on all people. Jesus instead prescribes certain characteristics for those who wish to enter the kingdom of heaven.

You can imagine the expectation building among the followers of Jesus. He preaches the good news of the kingdom of heaven. He brings the powers of their King in heaven to earth. Sick people stand up healthy! This would make news. But this rabbi preaches the kingdom of heaven.

What does it take to enjoy this kingdom, to enter this kingdom? Is He like the Pharisees who prescribe many rules and regulations, a path of strict righteousness? Must you earn your way, or part of your way, into this kingdom?

Jesus makes it clear right away in this Sermon on the Mount.

The promise of blessing is tied to the virtues given in the Beatitudes. Jesus expects you as his followers to exhibit all these characteristics, these marks of a living member of the church.

Why? We as rebels turned coat against God in favour of the Tempter. At one point, in the Garden of Eden, the blessing of God enriched us. But we turned our backs on God, siding with the Deceiver. God expelled us from the garden. The only way back is through Jesus who is the Way. As we will hear this afternoon, Jesus not only redeems us by his sacrifice on Golgotha, but Jesus

also renews us by his Holy Spirit. The Spirit makes us new, developing this new character in us with all the characteristics Jesus prescribes.

We look forward to re-entering that beautiful garden with the rich fruit trees. But we may not enter just like that. First of all, our relation with God must be restored. We need Jesus for that. We need our Saviour. We need his Spirit.

*Blessed are **the poor!*** Happy are the poor!

Yes, many pursue happiness. Some seek it by becoming wealthy so that they can enjoy tropical holidays. But please, do not try to locate paradise in some unspoiled Pacific island, where only the rich can afford to go. The kingdom of heaven is not a tropical paradise where the rich enjoy ease and luxury.

Others try fame. Yet the glitter of Hollywood deceives people, leaving them morally empty. The merry-go-round marriages testify to that restless and dissatisfied emptiness.

Still others pursue much knowledge. Be tops in your field. It brings satisfaction, happiness, some think. The same applies to athletes. But it does not. Why do many athletes opt out for some years, get married and then go back? Because there is more to life than sport! Too often the pursuit of happiness is chasing after the elusive pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The pursuit of wealth means a man neglects wife and family. Once he has earned his bundle, he finds that his house is empty, often literally! I read a list of the richest men on this planet and how they ended their lives. Out of the ten half died miserably, even by suicide! Pathetic! I accent this because you and I live in a materialistic society. It can easily infect us too. It makes us dead, useless members of the church.

Here on earth the various pursuits for happiness end in disappointment.

So let's listen to our chief Teacher about true blessedness.

Jesus teaches that this paradise requires repentance. Jesus also preached, ***repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand?* Show this repentance by godly fruit in your lives, as John the Baptist said. You would think that the church leaders stand out as examples of godly ones. Yet this paradise does not belong to the spiritual elite, who religiously adhere to every little rule of scribe and Pharisee. Jesus does not consider their righteousness sufficient. *Unless your righteousness exceeds that of these leaders, you by no means will enter the kingdom of heaven.* More is asked than these leaders teach! So Jesus is not afraid to insist on a holy way of life.

You must be **poor in spirit**. Notice contrast – *blessed, the poor in spirit!* Or I could say, *prosperous are the beggars!?* What a contradiction we say. Yet it is true. Our Lord teaches it. If you stand in God's favour, you are truly rich and blessed, even if you suffer like Job. But you must exhibit this quality of being *poor in spirit*.

When we think of the poor, visions of masses in Africa who have only the very basics come to mind. Or you think of our PNG church members who live in those poor settlement areas. These people have very little. Yet they, especially their children, can be very happy. Their bare laneways resound with laughter and games.

Jesus uses a term which refers to a beggar. You must think of a poor beggar, someone who has no daily food, no daily basics. They sit or kneel with open hands and begging eyes. They have nothing! They cannot do anything for

themselves. You see them everywhere in third world countries, also in PNG. Some carry signs telling people their plight. Poor beggars! Those beggars in the spirit pray to God for all they need. They need God. They call on his name, seek his grace. Such persons are living members of the church.

In the gospels we hear of such poor people, for example, the poor widow who gave her all into the box for the poor. Jesus pronounces her blessed. Mark, on the other hand, tells us of scribes who devour widow's houses. Scribes cursed poverty because it was a sign of God's curse. Rich and arrogant, they looked down at the poor.

So we note that those who are poor in spirit are often rich in mercy. They are living members who show compassion and care for those who need it. They are good payers for the church, for mission, for the schools, for Eucalypt (home for those with special needs) and for Fair Haven (our retirement center).

No wonder Jesus proclaimed *it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus proclaims blessing to the needy ones. He is the messianic King of whom we sing:

*The helpless poor he will deliver
And hear them when they call,
For he, the great and gracious giver,
Has pity on them all.
He saves them from oppressors greedy
And hears their anguished cries;
The blood of all the poor and needy
Is precious in his eyes (BOP, Ps 72, stanza 7).*

Why do I speak of the poor, since the text says, *poor in spirit*, you will say? Well, remember that Luke records the first beatitude as, *blessed are you poor* along with the corresponding woe, *woe to you rich*, for have received your reward. Luke does not add *in spirit*. Why?

Think of what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29:

Not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise.

Often God's people belong to the poor, to the oppressed, to the despised among society. Yet Jesus exalts them and blesses them, because these poor people have learned to rely on God, to depend on the Lord for all they need. Think of the poor man, Lazarus, in Jesus' story. He was rich toward God. The rich man banqueted every day in luxury. Yet he entered the torments of Hades. You see, the rich do not need God. They can take care of themselves. That often applies. Thus we make a point of it.

At the same time we must insist that Jesus nowhere declares **poverty of itself** blessed. For then the whole church needs to join one of the begging orders of monks and nuns. Become a Franciscan or Benedictine monastery!

Or you could then apply this text in other ways. Think of the political application by the Theology of Liberation who declares the poor classes blessed and tries to depose the rich, oppressing classes. The gospel takes on political colors. Then only the poor classes of society, and only the poor nations enjoy the blessing of God.

Or must we think of someone who has a poor spirit, a poor self-esteem, or who suffers from depression – poverty of spirit?

No, Jesus does not refer to these things.

Again, Jesus picks the term for a **beggar**, who has nothing of himself.

Matthew records the first beatitude as *blessed are the poor in spirit*.

These spiritual beggars open their hands toward heaven; their eyes plead with God in heaven. *We cannot do it ourselves. Be merciful to me, a sinner!* In ourselves we are blind, naked, poor and pitiful. That is our state before the holy God. Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, you and I confess that in the Heidelberg Catechism. We learn to know our sins and misery more and more. We cannot earn our own righteousness. Instead we flee to Jesus to claim his perfect righteousness, which He earned in our place.

How many really flee to God in this manner? As the angels look down from the window frames of heaven how many penitent persons do they see? How many truly abhor themselves; flee to Jesus and trust wholly in what Jesus has done for them? How many seek spiritual virtues, these spiritual gifts?!

Jesus had many poor, sick people come to Him. *Help us!*, pleaded those possessed by demons. *Heal us!*, implored the blind and lame. Jesus did heal, did help. But now He takes those same people along toward the mount where they may sit and listen to his commandments for their life of thanks.

Now you need to become *beggars in spirit*. You are not going to be lucky and happy just because I restore your bodies, says Jesus. Be *poor in spirit* and then you become blessed in a full sense.

Think of persons such as Gideon. Does Gideon have the means to free his people from the hand of Midian? Absolutely not! Gideon turns to God, pleading, *how can I and these lowly farmers conquer such a huge host of experienced fighters?* Impossible! Gideon begs for help. God tells him to send more of his soldiers away!! It seems even more helpless for Gideon and his small band. Yes, when all seems hopeless, then God provides the victory. How often has that not happened.

Here too we must rely on God and on what Jesus supply us. We must acknowledge we are bankrupt, unable to do any good to save us.

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Christ's cross I cling;
Naked, come to You for dress;
Helpless, look to You for grace.
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die.*

To see what Jesus means by *poor in spirit*, look at the opposite.

In Jesus' days the **Pharisee** thought himself to be rich in good works, blessed with God's many rewards. How they differed, excelled the sinners, the common rabble who know not the law, not to speak of the sinners who are rejected by God. Yet they did not enter the kingdom of heaven.

Sadducees prided themselves on diplomacy as the means to happiness and success. They would have scoffed at the idea of being poor in spirit.

Nor did the **Zealots** who dreamed of establishing the kingdom of heaven by the sword and blood. Many of these lived in Galilee. Jesus undoubtedly met many of these zealots in Galilee, the hot-bed of the resistance movement.

Instead, repentant tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners – the rejects of society - entered the kingdom of heaven. Instead of the privileged people of the Jews, heathens from all the directions of the globe come into the kingdom to sit with Abraham. These knew they could bring nothing with them, could achieve nothing to earn God's favour.

Calvin writes, *only he who is reduced to nothing in himself, and relies on the mercy of God, is poor in spirit.*

Consider with me one of the seven churches to whom Jesus sent a letter. I think of the Laodiceans. What does Jesus say to them? Listen (Rev 3:17):

You say, *I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing* – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked!

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, learn to see yourself as God looks at you. In yourself you are a beggar, blind, dead and lost. Seek all you need to be saved and blessed from Jesus. Be *poor in spirit*.

3. Thus the kingdom of heaven is yours.

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

The first and last beatitude end with this blessing - *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. That stylistic feature means everything else in between form details of this overall blessing - *for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

John the Baptist spoke already of the kingdom of heaven. John demanded repentance and fruits worthy of it. Then they would be ready for the kingdom. Jesus here pledges the kingdom of heaven to all who are *poor in spirit*.

If you want a passport to paradise, to the kingdom of heaven, then Jesus has prescribed it – be *poor in spirit*. God acknowledges that. You will receive the kingdom of heaven.

The kingdom is the realm of God. This kingdom originates in heaven, is ruled from heaven, has the norms of heaven, and enjoys the treasures of heaven. In its climax heaven comes down to earth. God will dwell with men.

There in the kingdom of heaven you will find untold wealth and glory. You find endless fruit. You rejoice in your God. You have an endless task in God's presence.

If you want to know about the value of the kingdom of heaven, read the parables of Jesus about the pearl of pearls or the hidden treasure in the field. They teach you how valuable the kingdom is.

Jesus offers it to you, freely! All you grownups who bow before God with a broken heart, holding out the empty hands of a beggar, for the grace and gifts of God, you receive it freely. So do your children. The kingdom of heaven belongs to them, says Jesus.

Follow Jesus, who *though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich* (2 Cor 8:9).

Amen.

PRAYER OF APPLICATION AND THANKS

Thanks for the Holy Spirit. Thanks for his gifts which He distributes to us as members of the body of Christ.

Remember the **expectant sisters** among us, and bless hem with health and the joy of good deliveries.

You care for our **seniors** at FHH. There are quite a few who cannot attend church any more.

Thanks for **Eucalypt Home**. Thanks for those who work there. Thank you we can have these members in our services on Sunday. Thanks for this home where some of our special members reside. **Other special members.**

Lord, we intercede for members with needs – bless those who undergo treatments. Give **Audrey vdHeide** recovery from her latest set-back. Bless the operation **Dineke Postmus** undergoes this week on her knee.

You make all of us bearers of a triple office. A mighty calling!

In addition you also bless us all with varying gifts, gifts which serve an important function in the body. We need them.

You give gifts to members so that some can administer funds, take care of stats, some play the organ, some take care of our church buildings, some help with various aspects of the church services. Others lead Bible clubs. Some teach our children. Some present messages on the radio. Some let their hands do the talking. Others show compassion. We need those angels of mercy. Others want to reach out to teach outsiders.

Thank you for this wonderful variety. We need them all. Use them all. Bind us together in the harmony of the Spirit in the warm embrace of your love. Build us up.

Bless the deacons as they promote the gifts of serving, showing mercy, helping, visiting the needy with cheerfulness. Bless the deacons as they activate us to do good to all men, esp to the household of faith.

Bless the elders as they use your Word to teach, to instruct at home visits. Give them good knowledge of your Word so that they can readily use it for various situations. Make them good leaders who exercise godly leadership. Give them the ability, in humility, to supervise our lives, our doctrine and life. Let them protect the pulpit as well.

Bless our ministers – Revs Huizinga, VanderHeide and Wildeboer - who prepare sermons and must deliver them to build up the body of Christ. Grant them wisdom as they exercise the ministry of the Word, the ministry of reconciliation.

Please work with your Holy Spirit in us to develop these characteristics Jesus commands. Make us poor in spirit. Our old natures are proud, arrogant, self-sufficient, independent and stubborn. We are the captain of our ship, the masters of our own fate. We can take care of ourselves.

Lord, make us truly humble before you. We are bankrupt, beggars in ourselves. Enrich us with your Spirit. Make us new. Make us good and living members of your church.

Sometimes we think that to be stripped of all our own pretences makes us pitiful as beggars. Yet Lord, we see trees stripped of their leaves in winter. In springtime you make the sap run up the trees, buds and leaves appear in a green shower of life. You promise the same to us.

All to your glory, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.