If I asked you this morning what it means to be blessed, what would you say? Yesterday when we were having the trunk or treat get together out in the parking lot, I have to say that I really felt blessed. It was nice to see everyone there having a good time and it was great to connect to people. Then after dinner I had a family zoom meeting and that was blessing too, to see dad with a sheet over his head and mom looking a witch. It was something that anyone would probably say was a blessing. Thanksgiving is just around the corner and we will once again celebrate our many blessings.

The word that Jesus uses today for blessed is really a synonym for Good Fortune. And so if I asked you this morning what you think of when you think of Good Fortune, what would think of? Probably what would come into you mind is along the line of rain when you need it. Or a bountiful harvest. Good Fortune is basically when you get a good hand or things sort of just go your way that day. You put the money in slots and just couldn’t lose. Your fortunate if you kids do well, if you have a good retirement. A good upbringing. We all pretty know what it means to be fortunate. A lot of it has to do with finances and the amount money you make. When some says “I’ve been fortunate” it’s usually along those lines. I was often told as a youngster that I was fortunate to live in the United States. Which meant that in some way that I didn’t understand then, I had it better than someone else. That’s pretty much good fortune, and that’s pretty much what we mean by blessed. It’s almost a word for lucky. Things have fallen your way.

And so our Gospel lesson today is quite a challenge to say the least. Because Jesus here is saying pretty much the opposite of that. What makes it more of a challenge is that this is the first teaching of Jesus in the Scriptures. The first words of his first public message to the people. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. And suddenly we realize that blessing for Jesus is something quite different than what we people usually do with it. It’s not that family and rain when you need are not blessings, that would be a bit silly. But obviously, what Jesus is teaching about blessing is something quite different.

So when I asked you this morning what it meant to you to be blessed, or what you thought of when you thought of good fortune, my guess is that few of you thought about being poor in spirit, or in mourning. Or persecuted, and being someone that people say evil things about. And that somehow this is associated with peace and mercy and meekness. Jesus is starting to teach about the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is what God is up to in the world. God is blessing the world. God is blessing you. Many people are seeking Good Fortune and God’s blessing. So the first thing Jesus teaches about is what that means. I mean if you say God is blessing you, you should know what that means.

To get into this, you need to go back a few verses and back into Chapter 4. Can’t do the whole thing but, Jesus again is just starting his ministry, and in 7 verses, here is what happens. He calls a few fisherman and together they start teaching in the synagoges and healing the sick. And His fame spreads all around even up to Syria and people begin to bring to Jesus all the sick, and the diseased, some translations use the word lunatics. The lunatics began to show up. The crazy. The mentally ill. All of the people who by any other definition would be considered not blessed. The last kind of person anyone would want to be. So imagine the scene. Jesus walks up a hill or mountain and looks down on the crowd of people that no one would want to be like. These are the people who are not blessed. Who definetly have not had good fortune..

So there you are. Can’t work, somehow barely scrapping by. A person that no one wanted to be around because if you were sickly or had a disease or were mentally ill it was thought you were demon possessed. Think about what it would be like to live day after like that, somehow just surviving another day. No hope, no future. You would probably be what? Poor in spirit right? Mourning. Meek. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness, just a place to belong. Longing for a bit of mercy. For a day of peace, just feeling well for a change. Tired of being looked down upon all. That’s the crowd he’s talking to.

So when Jesus says blessed are the poor in spirit, blessed are those who mourn etc. what is he doing? He is just blessing these people as they are. He’s just naming a reality that’s all around the country. That huge crowds of people are experiencing. He’s just describing them. He’s saying….I see it, I get it, I understand it. That you look around and you see all these people who seem to have it so much better than you, who seem to be so blessed. And have such good fortune. And you live day after day, sort of on the outside looking in. I get it. Blessed are you.

See, these beatitudes are not ideals. And they are not like character traits that we are supposed to have. And it’s not like poor in spirit is even good. Jesus is just describing the hurt and pain that is all around him. The suffering that is all around him. He is simply blessing who they actually are. Blessed are you. Fortunate are you. Because you are in touch with the hurt and the pain of the world. You understand the reality that lies underneath the surface of so many people. It’s everywhere. It’s reality. The awesome reality of human suffering. When you finally get that, when it finally hits home, you’re blessed. You are very, very, very fortunate. Because you understand why I came.

Now does this mean that having a nice family, or wonderful day at trunk or treat isn’t a blessing? Does it mean a decent retirement and rain when you need it, and a bountiful crop are not a blessing. Don’t think so. Is a good health not a blessing? Of course good health is a blessing and a beautiful day, and a dentist who can give you a root canal when you need it. That’s a blessing no doubt. The sort of expected way we talk about blessings is fine. Everything went my way today, I’m so blessed. God is so good to me and fills me with peace. That’s a blessing to be sure. Not saying it’s not.

But the problem is that the conventional form of blessing and good fortune…..Health, wealth, prosperity, a good mood today, a beautiful day, isn’t God good to me, can keep you from the truth that many people are experiencing today. You’ll never see it. You’ll probably never know it. One of 4 Americans struggles with despression. 1 out 6 American kids lives below the poverty line. But you can live your life in such a way that you don’t have to let it in. Your blessings can get in the way of reality. If God has blessed you with a good job and a good family, and you’re just so blessed, its very easy to lose touch with the millions of people for example who have gone bankrupt, or lost their jobs because of covid-19. You can be so into being blessed that you lose touch with what it’s like to be an immigrant seeking to come into this country, or someone with a felony record that can’t get a job. You can lose touch with pain of a family broken in two by divorce. Your good fortune can cover all that up, so you don’t have to go there. And you can lose touch with your own weariness at the world. Everyone is talking about covid fatigue. See what Jesus is saying? There are so many blessings. But the core blessing is this. The core of good fortune is this. You’re blessed when you begin to get it. When you being to understand what is actually happening to people. Ah, now you’re getting what God is all about.

Maybe it doesn’t seem like much of a blessing, this ability to see the hurt and pain that is all around you. Maybe you don’t yet see how that is the best fortune there is. But I can assure you there is nothing more needed in our world today. Because if you don’t get this blessing from Jesus today, here is what will happen to you and it happens without exception. If you can’t understand the good fortune and the blessing that comes with connecting to the reality of human suffering, what will you do when you do experience it. What will you do when the world seems so sick and diseased and messed up? What will you do with all the problems? What will you do when good fortune as commonly understood isn’t happening to you? Here’s what you will do, if you don’t get the beatitudes, and its guaranteed. What you will do, is look for someone to blame. The world around us is getting better at that all the time. And what it means is that people do not understand what Jesus taught about blessing .

How can it be, that getting the suffering of world is good fortune and a blessing? Well isn’t it true that you long for a better world? Don’t you long for a politics that is respectful? Don’t you long for relationships that have been broken to get healed? In other words, aren’t we all poor in spirit in some way? Hungry and thirsty for right relationship and the overcoming of division and hostility? Aren’t we tired of the fighting? Of the ridicule and reviling? A pandemic that drags on and on? Lots of funerals this year. It’s been rough. Aren’t we all a little weary? It wears us down and wears us out. Where did the blessings go? Where did the good fortune go? Should we ignore the teaching and look for someone to blame? Or might we begin to acknowledge that longing in our own hearts for a better world to be what Jesus means by being blessed. What Jesus means by good fortune. For isn’t that longing exactly what poor in spirit is? And now Jesus comes to us and says, “blessed are you”. Fortunate are you when you finally get there. When you finally realize how much you long for a much better world. Now your getting it. Now you just might be ready to see what I’m all about and the love and healing that I have for you. Amen.