

“9 ³/₄”

Matthew 5:1-20

Third Sunday of Epiphany

January 27, 2019

First Christian Church

Mahtomedi, MN

I've always been fascinated by what I can best call “hidden sight,” the ability to see something that others can't see. It's when two things, two ways of seeing things, two realities inhabit the same space. Some can see this, while others go through life not seeing this turn of events. Maybe the best example of this “hidden sight” is in the Harry Potter books. To get to the wizarding school of Hogwarts, you had to do that very British thing of taking a train. In the first book of the series, Harry learns that he has to take the train at a certain platform 9 ³/₄. Harry gets to King's Cross Train Station in London and looks for the platform and can't find it. There is a platform 9 and a platform 10, but no platform 9 ³/₄. But he notices a certain pillar that seems to straddle platforms 9 and 10 and he makes a run for it. Instead of running into a wall of bricks he walks through the pillar and into Platform 9 ³/₄. On the other side of the pillar there didn't seem to be anything, which caused his very mean uncle to laugh at him. But when he went through that pillar, he was able to see a world that no one else could even though it was right in front of everybody.

Our text today is the first part of what is commonly called the Sermon on the Mount. In Matthew, chapters 5-7 constitute the Sermon and the first 8 verses are the prologue, the Beatitudes. The word beatitude comes from the Greek word makarios which can be interpreted as blessed or happy. Happy is not always the best way to describe it, the better way to talk about it is using the phrase favored. Jesus is telling the people gathered who is favored in God's Kingdom, who matters. I'm guessing that in Jesus time as in ours there is a tendency to believe that society should favor the bold and successful. Our world pays attention to the rich and famous, but God pays attention to what is in our midst, but ignored. Blessed are the poor in Spirit. Blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the peacemakers, blessed are those who are persecuted.

Jesus is calling for his disciples to see who God finds favor with and the people God favors are the people who aren't the best and brightest. That is a message that so many need to here;

people who have lost their job or wondering how to make ends meet. The homeless youth that has been kicked out of the house and has to resort to couch hopping. The person who is addicted to opioids who feels that life hurts so much that they need a drug to numb the pain. I could go on and on. God's word is for the losers.

Then Jesus talks about salt and light. He looks at his disciples and says to them "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." He is directing that to the disciples which means it is a message for the church. We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are to be a people that is different from the rest of society, showing a different way of being and doing. We show people how we should live, but that isn't all. Salt doesn't mean much unless it is used, as a preservative and to season food. Light isn't something that you keep to yourself, but it's something that is shared. A light brightens a room, lights up a pathway, chases the darkness away. We are called to bring this message that God favors the losers, the not so perfect to others by being salt and light. Salt and light is about being evangelists to spread the good news to others.

The church, our church is called to be salt and light to the communities us. Actually churches are already salt and light to the surrounding community. The only question is if we are willing to live into being salt and light.

Jesus ends this passage by telling the disciples that in order to see God's kingdom, their righteousness had to exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees and scribes. It was these religious leaders that liked to show how holy or successful they were. Jesus will say later in Matthew 23, that they were more like whitewashed tombs, wonderful on the outside, but rotting and dead on the inside. To exceed the righteousness of the Pharisees meant understanding that you are among the losers, people that aren't successful. To be righteous means accepting the grace of God. The problem with the Pharisees and scribes is they think their works make them worthy. God would rather favor a person that is deemed a failure, because they can understand that need for grace and can see that need for grace in others as well.

I've said this before, but I also have a love of alternative realities and alternate histories. What if John F. Kennedy wasn't assassinated? Or a world where airships like the Zeppelins of old were in active use because the Hindenburg never blew up in 1937. Or where the American

Revolution never happened and we end up with a different United States. An alternate reality allows us to imagine a world that is so different from the world we know. At the very heart of any alternate reality is the desire to see that things can be different; sometimes for the better, and sometimes for the worst.

The Beatitudes is a way to see the world in a way if God intended. It's the alternate reality. It's Platform 9 ¾. This is the world where the imperfect, the losers, are the ones that count. It doesn't matter how popular you are, how rich you are, how smart you are or anything else. All that matters is that you are loved by God.

Church, this is the message we have to share with the world. It's time to get up and be salt and light because the times call for us to be that in a world that needs it.

Composer David Haas wrote a song based on the Beatitudes called "Blessed Are They." It's a beautiful song, but it also feel so incongruous with the text:

1. Blest are they, the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of God. Blest are they, full of sorrow; they shall be consoled.

Refrain: Rejoice, and be glad! Blessed are you, holy are you! Rejoice and be glad! Yours is the kingdom of God!

Dear Church, this is the message we have to share. Thanks be to God. Amen.