# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“God Blesses Those Who Realize Their Need for Him”**

**Matthew 5:3**

 **January 15, 2023**

Last Sunday we began our sermon series on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew chapters five through seven. We said that this Sermon empowers our mission statement, teaching us how to know Christ, become like Christ, and share Christ. This morning we explore the first of the eight Beatitudes found in verse three: “God blesses those who realize their need for him.” I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 5:1-10

One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them. “God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

“God blesses those who realize their need for him.” Why does Jesus begin here? He begins here because there is no entry into the kingdom of heaven apart from realizing your need for God. Or, to use the terminology of our mission statement, you cannot become like Christ unless you first realize your need for him. The problem with us human beings is that we think that we are in control of our lives and that we can make a relationship with God happen. Our belief is that we can make ourselves good enough for heaven, that we can train ourselves to become like Christ. For, after all, doesn’t God require of us to try a little harder, to work diligently at being a good Christian, to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps? Hasn’t God said, in effect, here is my Son, Jesus; now, you figure out how to be like him? No, that is not what God has said. Rather, God has sent us his Son so that by believing in him we might be united with him. That we might become, as the Apostle Paul puts it, “in Christ.” Paul speaks repeatedly about those who are saved, those who are in the kingdom of God, those who are on their way to heaven, as being “in Christ.” Not because of what they have done, but because of what God has done in them. Let me use my hands and attempt to illustrate what being “in Christ” means.

Imagine my right hand as being Christ and my left hand as being me. If I think that to be like Christ is to somehow bring my left hand up to the level of my right hand, to bring Steve up to the level of Christ, then I am not only sadly mistaken but hopelessly doomed to fail. I can never make myself like Christ – to love like he loved, to experience the kind of joy and peace that he did, to please God the Father like he pleased God the Father. I will always fall short. Thankfully, that is not what God asks of me. Instead, he joins me to his Son so that I am now in Christ and Christ is in me. Now, it is no longer just Steve living as Steve and trying his best but it is Steve living in Christ, and Christ living in Steve. Now, I live in his love, I experience his joy, I receive his peace.

Jesus illustrates this truth in his conversation with his disciples in the fifteenth chapter of John’s gospel. Using the image of a vine and its branches, he says: “I am the vine and you are the branches. Unless you live in me and I in you, you can do nothing.” Jesus goes on to point out that as the branch can only produce fruit if it is connected to the vine, so you and I can only produce fruit in God’s kingdom if we are connected to Jesus. But, and this brings us back to Matthew 5:3, we will only be connected to Jesus if we realize our need for him, if we humbly admit that we can’t live this Christian life in our own strength.

In the gospel of Luke, chapter eighteen, Jesus tells a story about two people in the temple praying to God. One was a self-righteous Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The proud Pharisee prayed: “I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like other people.” He had worked hard at being a good person and he figured that would please God and that God would hear his prayer. The tax collector prayed very differently: “O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.” He knew that only by the mercy of God would he have any hope of being heard. Jesus concludes this story by declaring that the sinner, not the Pharisee, was made right with God. For those who are proud of their spiritual accomplishments will be humbled, but those who humble themselves before God, those who realize their need for God, will be blessed. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

When we realize our absolute dependence on God, and our complete helplessness without him, we can stop focusing on ourselves and our shortcomings and our faults and our sin. We can stop trying to improve ourselves. Instead, we accept by faith that we have been united with Christ, that we are in Christ, and that by being in Christ we are members of God’s kingdom in which we are given every blessing of God. As we continue to explore this Sermon on the Mount, we will see the many ways that Christ desires to live his life in us. And, we will see that Christ is transforming those who realize their need for God. They are becoming more and more like him.