# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“God Bless Those Who Mourn”**

**Matthew 5:4**

 **January 22, 2023**

This morning we continue our exploration of the Beatitudes which form the first part of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Last Sunday we took a look at the first Beatitude, “God blesses those who realize their need for him.” Using my hands, I illustrated the difference between being far from God and thinking we can bridge the gap by ourselves, what the Bible calls being “self-righteous,” and being in Christ, what the Bible reveals as being “made righteous by God through Christ,” because we realize our need for him to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

This morning we move on to the second Beatitude, “God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” 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 mourn, for they will be comforted.” There are many kinds of mourning that seek comfort, and the Bible speaks elsewhere of mourning, say, for the loss of loved one. But the mourning of which Jesus is speaking here in the second Beatitude is directly related to the first Beatitude. To realize our need for God is above all to realize the reality of sin in our lives and how it is sin that has separated us from a loving God. So, says Jesus, since sin separates us from God, how can we best deal with sin which still affects those who have been united with Christ, who are in Christ, who are seeking to becoming like Christ? Mourn it, he says, and you will be comforted by God’s forgiveness.

To sin is to miss the mark. For example, when an archer shoots at the bulls-eye on an archery target and misses, the miss is called a sin. Spiritual speaking, God has given us the bulls-eye of his will, which Jesus summed up as “Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor.” What, then, when we’ve missed the mark by not loving God or neighbor? Some will deny that they have sinned. Either because they have no love for God or neighbor, or simply reject faith in God, they say, “I have not sinned.” As you may imagine, the Bible has an answer to the denial of sin. One such response is found in 1 John 1:8, “If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth.” Not living in the truth – not only the truth of sin itself, but even worse, we are not living in *the* truth. And who is *the* truth? Jesus Christ himself is the way, the truth, and the life. No one who says, “I am in Christ, I am united with Christ, I am becoming like Christ” can say, “I have no sin.”

For others, the issue is not denial but justification. We don’t deny sin, we don’t deny that we have missed the mark, but we seek to justify the reason for having done so. The word “justification” comes from the law court. The image is of you or me standing before God, the judge, having been brought up on charges of having sinned. “But, your honor” we say to God, “what I did wasn’t that bad.” Or, “You see, your honor, there are many who do much worse than I did.” Or, “After all, your honor, we love each other, and if we love each other, then anything we choose to do is okay, isn’t it?” We want to bargain with God, rationalize our behavior, and excuse our sin.

Jesus knows this. He knows how tempted we are to justify sin, so he says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” To mourn our sin is not to deny it or to justify it, but to grieve it and in our grief say, “I’m sorry.” We confess our sin, and then what happens? Having quoted 1 John 1:8 earlier, here’s verse 9 which probably sounds familiar: “But” - what a great word is “but.” There’s another way, a better way than denial or justification. “But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.”

So, verses eight and nine give us the options when we sin. Deny or justify it, thereby fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. Or, confess it - mourn it - thereby receiving forgiveness and cleansing, and realizing the promise that we are living in the truth that is Christ. Indeed, when we mourn sin we are confirming that he is active and living in us, and we are living in him.