

## The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

### February 2, 2020

**Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church**

**Pastor Labuhn**

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

For most of our country, today is Super Bowl Sunday number 54. The Kansas City Chiefs will play against the San Francisco 49ers in Miami Florida to see who will be revealed as the Super Bowl champions. And for whichever team wins, the fans of that team will rejoice, while the other team simply goes home and gets ready for another season.

This morning, we are gathering food as part of Super Bowl Sunday to benefit those in need, and to celebrate the 4th Sunday in the season of Epiphany. Epiphany is a season where Jesus is baptized and revealed to be the Son of God so that you and I might be baptized into His death and resurrection, and in the end, rejoice in His victory over sin, death, and the devil. It's a victory that we celebrate at our baptism as we enter into the Kingdom of God as a child. A kingdom that is quite different than any kingdom of this world. Yet it is one in which we learn and grow together as children of God.

There is a story of King Frederick William IV of Prussia who visited a school and asked the students some questions. He held up a stone and asked the children: *"To what kingdom does this belong?"* They responded: *"mineral."* He then pointed to a flower and asked: *"To what kingdom does this belong?"* They answered: *"Plant."* He then pointed to a bird flying by outside the window and asked: *"To what Kingdom does that belong?"* They replied: *"animal."* Then he asked: *"Now, to what kingdom do I belong?"* He unknowingly had raised a profoundly theological question. To what Kingdom do I belong? In a literal sense, as human beings, we can be classified as being part of the animal kingdom. But as a child of God, you and I are part of a much better kingdom - the kingdom of God.

Even before He called His first disciples, Jesus encouraged people to ***“Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand”*** Because the Kingdom is near. He proclaimed the Gospel of the Kingdom and healed many with various sicknesses and diseases. Then He led His disciples up onto one of the hills near the Sea of Galilee, along with those who followed Him and began to teach them more about the Kingdom of God. It’s at this point in Matthew’s Gospel, where Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount begins. And over the next several Sunday’s we’ll be taking a look at these teachings because they speak to us as well.

In Chapter 5, verses 1-12, sometimes called “The Beatitudes”, much of what is taught begins with the word, “Blessed” and is often described as a state of being “happy.” But these “Beatitudes” are much more than what the world might consider the circumstances that we find ourselves in, our wealth, our health, or how successful we are determine our happiness. But when we attain these things, while they might provide short-term happiness, we often find ourselves wanting more because they don’t always provide that ongoing happiness that we truly desire. The beatitudes are different because they apply to our present situation, and like our baptism, have their fulfillment in the promised future.

Jesus says, ***“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.”*** This is true for us when in spiritual bankruptcy, we turn to God and receive the abundant life of the Kingdom. Jesus says, ***“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*** When we lament because of our sin, there will be a day when we will be comforted and find ourselves in Heaven. He says, ***“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”*** Meaning the new heavens and earth after the resurrection. Jesus says, ***“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall receive mercy.”*** Following our Lord, those who truly appreciate God’s mercy in their lives find themselves more merciful with others... He says, ***“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”*** When we truly set our hearts in ongoing worship to God, we begin to see Him and His coming in our hearts. Jesus says, ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God...”*** This happens when His disciples bring peace to all those who place their trust in Him. Jesus says,

***“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*** Because those who bring forth His peace into this world will find opposition and experience some kind of persecution. And finally, He says in our Gospel, ***“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets before you.”*** This speaks to the grace that God gives out of His great goodness for those who endure to the end.

This teaching is different from the way of this world. Jesus shares with His disciples how to have a right relationship with God through faith. And this kind of relationship that comes to us through our Lord Jesus, who comes to us out of God’s great love. It’s out of this love for us that He humbled Himself, took all our sins upon Himself and died for us on the cross so that we might receive His righteousness. And having risen to new life on the third day, He shows us the way of everlasting life so that we too might live with Him in His Kingdom.

And so, while most of our country is getting ready to celebrate Super Bowl Sunday number 54 to see who will be revealed as the Super Bowl champions, as followers of Jesus, we gather this morning to hear God’s Word so that we might first continue to learn what it means to be in the Kingdom of God. So that throughout our lives, we might celebrate the victory that He won for us.

This morning our Open Arms children will sing songs praising God as part of Lutheran Schools Week. And we hear His Word encourage us to celebrate His victory by living in His Kingdom, forgiving others as we have been forgiven, loving those whom He loves, and helping those in need, as we ourselves are helped along that way that leads us to eternal life. Eternal life that comes to us by His grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

## Service Notes: The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

1. According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus began His public ministry by:
  - a. calling His disciples.
  - b. calling people to repentance and telling them that the Kingdom is near.
  - c. healing those who were sick.
  - d. being tested in the desert by Satan.
  - e. by being baptized.
  - f. all of the above.
2. The Beatitudes:
  - a. are part of Jesus' sermon on the mount.
  - b. often begin with the word "Blessed."
  - c. describe how you can be "happy."
  - d. a and b.
  - e. b and c.
  - f. a, b, and c.
3. Jesus teaching
  - a. is different from the way of the world.
  - b. gives us a greater understanding of how to live in the Kingdom of God.
  - c. helps us to lead a Godly life.
  - d. a and b.
  - e. a and c.
  - f. a, b, and c.
4. Today can be considered a day of celebration:
  - a. because we can watch the Super Bowl.
  - b. because the Word of God reminds us the Victory that is ours in Jesus.
  - c. because the Word of God shares with us how to work toward heaven.
  - d. because I don't have to go to work/school.
5. Because of Jesus, I can forgive as I have been forgiven. I plan to forgive:
  
6. Because of Jesus, I can love as I am loved by Him. I plan to:
  
7. Because of Jesus, I can help those in need. I plan to: