6th Sunday after Trinity
SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP - THE FOURTH BEATITUDE
West Henrietta - 1961
Rolling Meadows - 1963

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

In Nomine Jesu

St. Matthew 5: 6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.

Have you ever wondered what happened to the Prodigal Son? You will remember that the Prodigal Son took three great steps from a life of debauchery and wickedness to find his way back into the graces of his father. He took the first step when he recognized the hopelessness of his condition and confessed, I perish with hunger. He took the second step when he admitted that he was personally responsible for his plight, by saying, I have sinned. He took the third step when he put aside all self-will and completely submitted to the will of his father by pleading, Make me one of your hired servants. With that he was back in the welcoming arms of his father, fully restored to sonship. But what happened after that? Christ does not say. It was not necessary for the point of His story. He merely wanted to emphasize that God's arms are wide open to any sinner who recognizes the hopelessness of his own plight apart from God, sincerely confesses his own responsibility for the sinfulness of his life, and completely surrenders his life to God, trusting in Christ as his Savior. But it is not difficult to imagine what happened to the Prodigal Son, when he had been completely forgiven and restored. Don't you think he was anxious thereafter to do everything he could to show how grateful he was? Don't you think he tried very hard to please his father?

In His fourth Beatitude Christ shows us that the fourth step on the road to true happiness is an intense desire to do that which pleases God. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. When a man is overwhelmed with a sense of sin in his life - and who of us has not ample reason to be distressed by the tragic difference that lies between what we are and what God expects us to be? - and then penitently makes full confession to God, pleading for His gracious forgiveness for Jesus the Savior's sake, and receives the joyful assurace that his sin is fully and instantaneously forgiven, how can he stop there? Will he not be anxious to express his appreciation in a life that says with one great and glorious exclamation point Thank You, God!?

Many would like to change the 6th Beatitude to read: Blessed are they who keep struggling to do better; for they shall be rewarded. Those who have not read their Bible carefully, are sometimes motivated by the mistaken idea that if they are good enough and do enough good deeds, God will be pleased with them and eventually take them to heaven. But our Beatitude says nothing about self achievement. Listen to what God says through the mouth of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Ephesians: Even though we were dead in our sins, God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love He had for us, gave us life together with Christ - it is, remember, by grace and not by achievement that you are saved - and has lifted us right out of the old life to take our place with Him in Christ in the Heavens... It was nothing you could or did achieve - it was God's gift to you... No one can pride himself about earning the love of God. The fact is that what we are we owe to the hand of God upon us.

~~Let's say~~ Imagine for a moment that you are a wealthy person who is celebrating a birthday today. And let's say further that my birthday is coming soon. If I give some trifling ~~thing~~ gift to you only because I hope you will be obligated to give me a costly gift when my birthday comes, would you appreciate my gift to you? On the contrary, You would have reason to resent it as an expression, not of love, but of sheer selfishness. By the same token, how can men hope, with the trifling goodness of their life, to obligate God to give them the eternal glories of heaven in return? Does not God have very reason to resent such selfishness?

Now, let's say that you have been very kind to me and I am anxious to express my appreciation. When your birthday comes I therefore give you a gift. It's basic value is not important - because I want to express my love and appreciation - nothing more. Such a gift would not be tainted with selfishness and you could accept it joyously. Every gift God gives us, for body or for soul, for time or for eternity, is an expression of His love for us. We do not deserve it. We do not, and in fact, we cannot earn it. Anything therefore that we do for God, to be acceptable to Him, dare not be a selfish bid for further favour, but must be an expression of our love and gratitude.

With that in mind we can understand the meaning of our text: Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. We may not all know from personal experience what it is like to be hungry for an extended period, without being able to find food to satisfy that hunger. Some of us ~~undoubtedly~~ perhaps do know! But we all understand that hunger is a craving for food and thirst is a craving for water. And we all know something of the pleasure that lies in satisfying a good appetite with wholesome food and a great thirst with a drink of good, fresh water.

However, there are hungers and thirsts which cannot be satisfied with food and water. The Christ who said, Man ~~shall~~ does not live by bread alone, also said, Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness. According to its derivation, the word righteousness is a compound word and includes the thought of that which is right and that which is wise. To be righteous, then, is to do that which is right and according to the wisdom of God. When Moses had reminded the Children of Israel of the commandments of God, he added, It shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God as He has commanded us. Christ is here seemingly not speaking about His own perfect righteousness, which becomes ours as we accept it by faith, but about the righteousness of our own lives as we live according to God's laws - all of our behaviour which is motivated by our love of God and our love of our neighbor - in other words, everything that we do to day Thank You! to God.

While Christ lived on earth, He did more than fulfil God's laws for us. He also gave us an example in righteous living. The Roman centurion was so impressed with Christ's righteousness, even while Christ was dying on the Cross like a vicious criminal, that he exclaimed, Certainly this was a righteous Man. Wherever Christ set foot, He left the mark of His goodness. Those whose bodies were deformed or diseased, He restored to health. He fed the hungry, comforted the bereaved, inspired the discouraged, forgave the guilty.

And now Chirst says to ~~us~~ you and me, Follow Me. The righteous life is therefore the Christ-like life. No one can follow perfectly in the footsteps of Christ, but

every Christian tries. It all depends on how important Christ is to you, how much value you place on His Cross of redeeming love, the peace which His forgiveness brings into your heart, the ability to go to sleep at night with the knowledge that no matter what the night or the morrow may bring - you are God's child forever. If Christ is at the very heart of your life, the people around you will know it. When a missionary became ill and was unable to meet with his class of children, the teacher who took his place described Christ to the children without telling them it was Christ. She told of His kindness, His understanding, His thoughtfulness, His helpfulness, and then asked the children who it was she was describing. The first answer was, That's our missionary. I wonder, has anyone ever mistaken you for Chris

Hunger is a sign of health. Mothers are happy if their children eat well. One of the first questions the doctor is likely to ask you is simply, How is your appetite? Christ wants us to know that our hunger and thirst for righteousness is an indication of our spiritual health. The more we love God and the more grateful we are for everything He has done for us, the stronger will be our desire to please Him. A traveller once told of his thirst while he was lost in the desert. He said, At first I was so thirsty, I was ready to give my right arm for a drink of water. The next day I would have given both arms for a drink of water. My thirst was finally so intense that I was willing to die for just one swallow of water. When did you last wake up in the morning with the desire, I must do great things for God today? When did you last go to sleep at night dissatisfied with yourself because there was so little in the day that was righteous, so little that had been done for love of God?

Christ says, Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled. There is joy in satisfying our hunger and thirst, and the better our appetite, the greater is our delight in eating. There is infinitely greater joy in satisfying hunger and thirst for righteousness. The greater our love is for God, the more intense will be our desire to please Him, and the greater will be our joy in knowing that we have done His will. Christ will fill us

to the brim with happiness.

One day, when all of us stand before the judgment seat of Christ, none of us will dare to be proud of our life. But those who in faith have loved and served Christ, He will welcome into His eternal, heavenly home. In doing so, He will say to them, Whatever you did to the least of My brethren - in feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, welcoming the stranger, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, taking an interest in the prisoner - you really did to Me! May God give each of you such a hunger and thirst for living your life for Jesus!

Amen.