8th Sunday after Trinity
SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP - THE SIXTH BEATITUDE
West Henrietta - 1961
Rolling Meadows - 1963

Rev. Carl F. Thrun

IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 5: 8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if somewhere in our troublous times a leader would arise of such proportions and abilities that he could solve all the problems and conflicts of our world? Oppressive rulers, bent on dominating the lives of others for selfish purposes, would be overthrown. The best knowledge and technical abilities would be applied in all parts of the world, so that everyone could expect a long and healthy life, live in a beautiful home with all the latest conveniences, eat the finest food and enjoy the best in entertainment. Wouldn't that be wonderful? But unfortunately it would not touch the greatest problem of our times. Health, housing, food - all these are big problems for our world. But our real trouble lies in the human heart.

Many years ago, when the world was tense with bitterness and conflict and when the living standard of kings was considerably below that of most common men in our day, the long-promised Messiah appeared. Many were waiting for Him. They were expecting a Messiah of earthly power and splendor, a general who would drive the hated Romans out of their country, a king who would make it possible for all of them to live like princes. They were looking for a Messiah who would supply them with material advantages of every kind and give them a life of luxury and ease.

Now He was here and they came to hear Him preach on the mountainside. Most of them were deeply disappointed in Him. He was not gathering an army to throw off the yoke of the Romans; He was not promising them material wealth; He was not distributing fine clothes and excellent food. Rather, He was telling them of an altogether different kind of happiness. In His Beatitudes, with which He began His Sermon on the Mount, Christ was telling them, not of things they were to enjoy on the outside, but of how they were to be on the inside. Christ was speaking not of military victories, royal garments and splendid banquets, but about the condition of their hearts. Blessed are the pure in heart, He said, for they shall see God.

In this Beatitude Christ takes us, as H does in every Beatitude, to the very center of things, to the heart of man. He is emphasizing that a man's life

consists not in the abundance of the things that he possesses. The important thing is not what a man has, but how he feels; not the circumstances that surround him, but the attitudes that control him.

A pastor tells about visiting two women in the same hospital. One was a woman whose life had become heavy with crosses. In the space of a few short years she had lost her husband, two children, her health and her job. Now she faced a serious operation and knew there was a good chance she would not recover. But she had no complaint, only gratitude for the many blessings she enjoyed, gratitude even for the blessing of her crosses. Her one request was, Pastor, please say a little prayer with me and then I'll have the operation. If God wants this to be the end of my life, I am ready. If God wants me to live, I'll be satisfied too.... The other patient was a young woman whose life had been an unending round of fun and pleasure. Any crosses she had ever carried had been little ones. Now she had had a very minor operation and it had been completely successful. She had enjoyed the best of care and was ready to go home the next day. Yet she was almost hysterical with bitterness. Why does God make me suffer like this? she cried. Everybody else is having a good time and I have to be cooped up in this dungeon! She had so much material blessing, but no gratitude. She had so little affliction, but no strength to endure it.

What happens to us in life, the material blessings we enjoy or the crosses we have to carry, is not nearly so important as how we enjoy them and how we carry them. One man pricks his finger and bitterly complains about his suffering, until a mule kicks him in the face. Then he knows there is a difference. One man lives luxuriously, but most unhappily and discontentedly. Another has small possessions and big crosses, but lives a happy life that is a song of praise to his Creator. Do you see, then, why it is so important that Christ should speak to us, not about the problems that are outside of us, but about the problems of the heart - our attitudes, our desires, our loves. Tell me how you feel about God, about other people, about money, about suffering, and it will be easy to tell you what kind of person you are. Let me observe you carefully, in all your activity, what you do

and what you say in various circumstances, and in time it will be possible to tell you quite accurately what is in your heart.

Blessed are the pure in heart, says Christ. Where can we obtain such a heart? It is about time we stopped kidding ourselves about our own essential goodness and moral worth. We are all inclined to compare ourselves with others who are morally inferior and considerably more delinquent that we are, and then conclude that we rank rather high in the scale of human behavior. We seem always so much more willing to confess the sins of others than to recognize our own. We say that we detest hypocrites, two-faced pretenders; and all the while we fail to recognize the hypocrisy of our own two-faced hearts. We demurely convey the impression to the world that we are moral, law-abiding citizens while our evil imaginations run riot. Some of us like to carry ourselves as if we were Sir Galahad, who declared: My strength is as the strength of ten, Because my heart is pure. The truth is that we are better compared to Sir Lancelot, who carried himself nobly and wielded his sword courageously, but who, while he fought, betrayed the king he served. The famed ascetic Jerome, who wrestled for years with his soul in solitude and fasting, far removed from all outward temptations of the flesh, reports that he was still plagued by visions of dancing girls. All the virtuous resolutions in the world will not give you a pure heart.

What we need is major heart surgery of the kind that the Lord prescribed for Israel: A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. The old heart must go, because it is impure. Jesus Christ alone can give you a pure heart. This is the purpose for which He came. The innocent took the place of the guilty, the just for the unjust. His crucifixion on Calvary meant that He deliberately sacrificed His purity on our behalf, that we might be rendered fit to see God. The Great Physician performed a Good Friday operation to remove our stony heart and to give us a new, pure heart. It is a heart where Christ Himself lives and dwells and has His being.

To be pure in heart is to give all life, all interests and all ambitions, into the hand of God. It is complete surrender to God. It is to live a life that sings: Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee; take my moments and my days; take my hands...my feet...my voice...my lips; take my silver and my gold... my intellect...my will...my heart...my love; take myself and I will be ever, only, all for Thee. A Christian missionary tells how a man came to him with the questions How can I get rid of sin and how can I find God? The missionary asked if anyone had given him advice on the matter. Yes, he replied, I was told to sit down in one place and not roam about until I had conquered all my senses and passions and worn them out. Then I would find release. I was told it would take a long, long time. Then the missionary told of his own experience: My yearning was exactly like your yearning. I needed to know how I could get rid of sin and I needed to know God. But I did not have to stay in one place till I had worn out my passions. I simply turned over a bankrupt soul to Christ and as I gave Him my all, He gave me His all. It did not take ages; it took surrender. It did not take time, it took me. That is being pure in heart.

Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God. In the Bible, in the Book of Esther, seven princes who stood next in honor to the king are described as those who saw the king's face. The meaning is clear. They had the right of audience with the king. That seems to be the meaning of Christ's promise here. The pure in heart, those who completely surrender to God, have the right of audience with God, the privilege of immediate access to Him in prayer, while they live on earth, and the glory of living in His presence in heaven forever. Seeing God is the soul's greatest happiness; seeing God as we do by faith in our present life, is heaven on earth; seeing God as we shall in the world hereafter, is the fullness of all possible joys and the heaven of heavens. May God give each of you such a pure heart, completely surrendered to Christ.

Amen.