4th Sunday after Trinity
SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP - THE SECOND BEATITUDE
West Henrietta, 1961
Rolling Meadows 1963

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IN NOMINE JESU

St. Matthew 5: 4 Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.

Have you ever observed a small boy as he looks over a page of arithmetic problems his teacher has just corrected? He thought he had a perfect paper and expected a grade of 100%. But he finds that many of the problems are wrong and the grade is only 60%. As he checks his mistakes, the look on his face is a sad one. Or, have you ever seen a housewife baking what she hopes will be a special cake for a special occasion; but while the cake was in the oven, something distracted her, and the cake burned? Her reaction is a sad one. Imperfections of all kinds lead to sadness. Have you ever thought how wonderful life would be if everything were removed from the world that keeps it from being perfect? If there were no storms, no accidents, no disease, no death - nothing to make us sad - life would certainly be grand. We have all had moments - days perhaps - when all is well and living is pure joy. But it does not last. We must all descend at times from the hills of joy to the valleys of disappointment, defeat, and even despair.

People very often disappoint us. Those of whom we expected great things turn out to be something far less, and we are sad. Have you ever thought how enjoyable life would be; if those who are in positions of authority were never interested in personal gain, but concerned only about the welfare of those they govern; if those with whom we live and work were always kind and understanding, honest and considerate and unselfish? Or, to bring the matter closer to home, have you ever considered how different your life would be if you never made any mistakes, if your treatment of others would never lead to regrets, if in the eyes of God you were the perfect person He expects you to be? The difference between what you are and what God wants you to be is a sorrowful one.

This brings us to Christ's second recipe for real happiness, The Second Beatitude: Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. At first glance this statement seems most strange and unusual. We are not ready immediately to nod our heads in approval. But one fact we are quick to appreciate. Christ does not ask us to pretend that our bodies and our spirits are never hurt or that sorrow is not real.

We want to be careful, however, not to exaggerate the sorrow in our life. There is an old Greek legend about a woman who came to the River Styx to cross over into the next world. The old ferryman was a helpful fellow and suggested that she might drink of the waters of Lethe and so forget everything life had ever meant to her. The suggestion pleased her and she said, Then I will forget all I have ever suffered. True, said the ferryman, and you will forget also all the happiness you have ever known. I will forget all my failures, the woman went on. True, responded the ferryman, and you will forget all your satisfactions and achievements. Once more the woman spoke, but now more slowly and thoughtfully, I will forget everyone who ever hated me. True, said the ferryman, and you will forget everyone who has ever loved you. The woman paused for a moment, then refused to touch even a drop of the waters of Lethe. She was willing to remember the sadness in life that she might retain also the memory of love and happiness.

Christ goes even further. He says that mourning and happiness are somehow related. To us they appear to be altogether different ingredients that we would never think of putting into the same bowl. Happiness and blessing we would like to put into a vase and make a centre-piece out of it. Mourning and sadness we would like to throw out with the garbage. But Christ says, Blessed are they that mourn.

Christ is certainly not suggesting that we deliberately look for something to be sad about. There are those who have been called gluttons for wretchedness. They are mourning doves in human form. Like the dove, they begin the day with their mournful song; unlike the dove, they keep up their sad melody all through the day and night. They are blind to all the joy and beauty of living in God's great world, and focus their eyes continually on the ungly and painful. They seem to be most content when they have something to complain about. There is no blessing in that kind of mourning.

There is no blessing either in the mourning that is born of self-centeredness and self-pity. It is childish to cry over spilt milk and to shed tears over hurt pride. The continuous chipping of the PITY-ME-BIRD leads only to bitterness and misery.

There is no blessing in mourning over the penalties of our wrong-doing, while we remain unconcerned about the true significance of our wrong. A pastor tells of a young woman who came weeping into his office, confessing that she was sorry about what she had done. The pastor asked her why she was sorry. Her response was, I'm so embarrassed. What will others think of me? God, for example? asked the pastor. No, she said, that does not really bother me. It's what my friends and the people who know me will say. There is no blessing in tears shed over tragedy we fashion for ourselves, tears that blind us to what our sin does to our relationship to God.

There may be no blessing either in the loss of a loved one or in the shadow of real tragedy. A woman wrote a letter to a friend, and in it she spoke continuously about the death of her husband who had died some years before. After all these years I still cannot accept it, she said, I just grieve - and grieve - and grieve. Christ was most sympathetic when He came upon genuine grief, but those who weep selfishly and inconsolably can never find His comfort.

What, then, does Christ mean when He says, Blessed are they that mourn? Genreally speaking, any mourning is blessed if it leads a person closer to God and to the Savior. When tears blind us to the lustre of earthly things, that eventually pass, and help us see the glory of God and heavenly things, that never pass, they are truly a blessing. Hosea recorded this meaningful promise of God, I will make the valley of Achor a door of hope. God was speaking to His people in the Old Testament and for them the valley of Achor stood for trouble. When a man came on evil days, they said, He is passing through the valley of Achor. Enemies threatened God's people from every side and problems were numerous, but God promised, All this trouble can be turned into a door of hope. If you will turn back to Me, the valley of Achor will become portals that lead to great blessing. St. Paul declared, We rejoice in suffering. Don't think that Paul was having a good time just because he had great suffering. He went on to explain: We rejoice in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character

produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

A cross is not merely something to mourn about. It is a magnet that draws us closer to God and a tool with which to fashion a more God-pleasing life. A pious Christian mother, who found out that she would be an invalid for life, said to her children, Now God will help me to show you how to take a cross and make out of it something more beautiful than a piece of jewellery. And God did!

Blessed are they that mourn. Christ had more in mind than mourning the loss of someone or something we love. The word used in the original Greek refers especailly to mourning over sin. Blessed are they that recognize their spiritual poverty. Blessed are they that appreciate how comeletely dependent they are on God for everything they are or ever will be. When the Prodigal Son had sunk to the level of living with the pigs, he finally recognized his poverty. I perish with hunger, he confessed. And immediately there was hope for him. But if he had gone no further, that is exactly what would have happened to him: he would have perished with hunger. His hunger was only a symptom of a more serious condition. It caused him to see the reason for his misery. He took the next step toward a cure: I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. No doubt, the Prodigal was sad when his money ran out, when his fair weather friends turned against him, when he could not find enough to eat. But there was no blessing in that. He found blessing only when he saw that he himself was to blame. His mourning led him to make a full confession to his loving, understanding, and forgiving Father. To his amazement, he was reinstated with all the blessed privileges of full sonship.

Christ was called The Man of Sorrows because He viewed the sin of all mankind with God's full sensitiveness to sin. No wonder He was a Man of Sorrows. But He did more. On the Cross He died for all the sins of all minkind that all might know the comfort of complete forgiveness. We are told that the greatest danger in some diseases is that they attack our bodies and destroy them, while we

are not even aware of their presence. The greatest danger ~~of~~ to a man's soul lies in the fact that it is being destroyed by sin and he may not even know it. Paul speaks of those who are past feeling. The saddest thing in all the world is not a soul that mourns. It is a soul so insensitive to sin that it is incapable of mourning over it. Paul also writes: Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation. Only as he mourns over sin will a man seek God's mercy. But seeking it in Christ, he will surely find it.

Christ said, Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted. Although David was a great man of God, he fell deeply into sin. He committed adultery and tried to cover up with murder. David refused to recognize his sin for what it was and he came dangerously close to being past feeling. Finally under the promptings of the prophet Nathan David was led to confess, I have sinned against the Lord. If you want to get an impression of the profound mourning that gripped David at the recognition of his sin, read his confession in Paslm 51: Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy loving kindness; according unto the multitude of Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. And if you want to know the comfort David received, read his song of joy in Psalm 32: Blessed is he whose transgress is forgiven, whose sin is covered... Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart. May you find such comfort in Christ for all your mourning!

Amen.