

Epiphany 4 1/29/23
1 Corinthians 1:18-31 A

SERMON TEXT IS THE APPOINTED EPISTLE LESSON FOR THIS
SUNDAY, FROM THE 1ST CHAPTER OF 1ST CORINTHIANS

You know what today is and you know what you are going to be doing today. (Of course, it goes without saying that it would be a much better day if another team were playing this afternoon. I will let you decide for yourself what team that is.) And as you are watching said events on tv, you are going to be gorging yourself with chips, popcorns, pretzels, M&M's, and all sorts of good things.

And, you know how you are going to do it – you are going to take the big chips, dripping with nacho cheese, first. You will begin consuming the popcorn with the fluffy, white popped kernels. Ditto on the pretzels. Oh, and the M&M's, you will devour the BIG ones – and you know what color you will snarf down first, and the one color you will dutifully avoid. So that by the 2nd half of the 2nd game, all that will be left are those half-popped and unpopped kernels of popcorn. All that will be left of the trial mix is the raisins. The only M&M's left will be those tiny, broken fragments of shells! You just can't wait, right!

In our Epistle reading today, Paul teaches that God does things far differently than we poor, miserable sinners. When God chose His children, His heirs, His lights, He did not reach into the bowl and grab the big pieces first. Rather, God reached past the big pieces to the broken pieces and half-popped kernels. We rejoice that God chose such sinners like you and me to be His children and heirs. Paul writes:

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to

shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chooses what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God (v. 26-29).

Rejoice and be glad, My Brothers and Sisters in Christ, God picked you. God chose you to have everlasting life.

Take a look at yourself. What are you? A husband, father, grandfather? Wife, mother, grandmother? Student, farmer, coal miner, retired?

There is one thing that we all are -- sinners! That's right, young, old, male, female, retired, or just plain tired, we are all "by nature sinful and unclean." You yourself said so again this morning. We have sinned against God in our thoughts, words, and deeds, by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved God with our whole heart nor have we loved our neighbors as ourselves.

Have you ever seen a chicken with its head chopped off? The chicken runs around as fast as its little feet will go. It looks alive; it pretends to be alive; it gives the impression that it is alive. But without its head, is that chicken alive, ...or dead? In the fall into sin, we lost our head Christ. So, like the chicken running around without its head, we try to convince ourselves that we are not really dead in sin and that we can make ourselves right with God by our works, or that we can earn God's grace, we can make ourselves "better Christians" with our works.

The law is but a mirror bright to show us that we are not wise, mighty, nor noble before God. We are helpless to save ourselves. So, God, who loved us and knew our helplessness, chose us in Christ Jesus.

We rejoice in this glad Epiphany season that God appeared to us in human body to speak to us with human voice to announce God's favor and

pardon for us poor sinners. Our Gospel lesson, the Beatitudes as they are commonly known, is Christ announcing to us how blessed we are in Him. The Beatitudes describe us in our relationship to God through the Savior Jesus Christ.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (v. 3). This poverty that Jesus talks about is not a lack of earthly silver and gold, but to see that our sin makes us beggars before God. Like David confessed after his sin with Bathsheba: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions" (Ps 51:1)). Like the Syrophenician woman, we beg for even the crumbs of God's grace. Or, like the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. While the Pharisee told God how great he was, the Tax Collector merely prayed: "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Lk 18:13)!

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (v. 4)." Seeing ourselves in the mirror of God's Law, we mourn sin and the death that it has brought upon us. But, God has Good News for us--we are comforted in Jesus Christ, "Son (Daughter), be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matt 9:2).

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." To be meek before God means to have patient trust in God and His good and gracious will, even though the wind and waves are storming all around us. Remember the Apostle Paul and his thorn in the flesh. Three times Paul tells us he pleaded with God to take it away, but God said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Co 12:9). The hymnwriter said it so well, "Lord, take my hand and lead me along life's way".

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied (v. 6). Seeing ourselves in the mirror of God's Law, we see that we are not righteous before God. To "hunger and thirst for righteousness" means to long, to yearn to be right with God, and understanding that we, by our good works, cannot make ourselves right with God and earn everlasting life.

Here is the GOOD NEWS of the Gospel: The Beatitudes are truly a description of Christ Himself. He is the One who was rich, but became poor for our sake. He is the One who mourned what sin did to the Father's creation and the Father's creatures. He is the meek one; who even in His dying woes on Calvary's cross entrusted Himself into His Father's hands. He is the merciful One, who had mercy on us by dying on that cross for us. He is the Peacemaker between God and us poor sinners, for all God's wrath was poured on out Him and we are forgiven and reconciled to our Father in heaven.

Baptized into Christ, you live in Him and He lives in you. So, go ahead: take a look at yourself, in view of your baptism. What are you? You are the light of the world, shining His light to this sin-darkened world through you. You are Christ's ambassador, He makes the Gospel known through you. You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's people, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Pt 2).

But, the devil doesn't want that. This world, in all its perversity, most certainly will not think you wise; nor powerful; nor very important at all. That's why we pray in our collect: "Almighty God, You know we live in the midst of so many dangers that in our frailty we cannot stand upright. Grant strength and protection to support us in all dangers and carry us through all

temptations.” God hears and answers our prayer. Our Loving Lord gives strength and protection to us as He comes to us through His Word and His own Body and Blood to preserve us in the faith He began at our baptism. We are chosen by God. Try as He might, the evil foe cannot take us from Christ nor rob us of everlasting life in heaven.

Don't let the roar of that liar Satan frighten you. Don't let the world squeeze you into its mold. Don't give into the doubts and despair of your own flesh.

God has chosen us and uses us for His good purpose, and His promise rings in our ears, “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (v. 12).