

*Based on Matthew 5:1-12*  
*Fourth Sunday after Epiphany*

*When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:*

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

*“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

*“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.*

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

*“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

*“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*“Blessed are you when people 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 in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

It is a truism in our society that we value what the famous and wealthy have to say over and above other, usually more informed and experienced, voices. Why would we trust what someone who blathers on TV for a living and who themselves only ever attended prestigious private schools has to say about how public schools should be run?

Why do we lionize business leaders like Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, or Bill Gates and assume their success imputes upon them some more elevated wisdom or authority? These three aren't necessarily more brilliant, but they are much luckier. All three had very wealthy parents who were able to support them early in their careers as entrepreneurs and who were able to marshal important early investments for them. And all three became wealthy by exploiting someone else's creation. What someone once said of George W Bush, "he was born on third and thought he hit a triple," applies to most of the famous and wealthy people you've heard of. Most of success in life is luck. Of course, one has to be able to take advantage of the opportunities and have real abilities; but my point is that those abilities aren't so much different from those of other talented people who don't get the same opportunities.

To grant these people greater authority because of luck is the true wisdom of the world that St Paul warns of us in his first letter to the Corinthians when he writes; "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" This wisdom of the world is a charade, and worse, it damages our souls because when we participate in it, we deny our own dignity and our own beloved-ness of God.

When we think of blessings, we don't usually imagine the things Jesus says are blessed in this passage. Quite the opposite, we usually look at these things as curses. None of us want to be poor, or in grief, or persecuted. And yet Jesus assures us that it is these moments when we are most vulnerable, when we are most afraid, when we are most at risk, that we are blessed, that God is closer to us than ever.

Because that's what real blessedness is, closeness to God. It is the times when we walk most closely and most surely the narrow path Jesus has shown us that we are enveloped in blessedness. But to begin on that path we need to set aside not only our false beliefs about others superiority, but also the false beliefs we have of ourselves. To follow Christ is to shed both our fears and our aspirations of worldly accomplishments and turn instead to the small but vital work of building God's kingdom, one relationship at a time, one helping hand at a time.