

Fourth Sunday After the Epiphany – 2023

Micah 6:1-8

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

Will the real Wiley Smith please stand up? If you are anywhere close to my age then you are familiar with that line. If you happen to be a lot younger than me then you're about to learn a little something. It was the tag line for a game show, a fun show, called "To Tell the Truth." Three people were brought in before a panel of celebrity judges and these three people all claimed to be the same person. Typically, the person had some unusual occupation – a tight-rope walker, a nuclear physicist, or a Formula One mechanic. As the show started, each contestant would announce in turn to the camera: "I'm Gregory Nyquist." "I'm Gregory Nyquist." "I'm Gregory Nyquist." And the game was afoot. One guy was telling the truth. The other two were imposters. The other two were lying their lips off. The celebrity panelists got to ask the contestants a series of questions, attempting to expose their deception or hone in on the genuine article by virtue of his believable answers regarding tight-rope walking or nuclear fusion or how a Formula One car works. At the end, the celebrities all made a guess and the host would then say: Will the real Gregory Nyquist please stand up? The three contestants pull a few head fakes before the real article stands and applause fills the studio. Of course, everyone at home plays along as the game unfolds and tries to figure it out.

To Tell the Truth – Jesus loves that game. "I am the Christ." The whole world is on the celebrity panel and that means you. At one time, a fellow named Nicodemus was on the celebrity panel. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and he came to see this impressive teacher. Nicodemus said this: "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). How does Nicodemus identify Jesus? As a teacher come from God (not exactly spot on). Nicodemus goes home that night with a consolation prize, like a toaster or a ratchet set. "I am the Christ." Peter was on the celebrity panel. Jesus told Peter that the Christ would have to suffer. How did Peter respond? "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you" (Matthew 16:22). It's almost like Peter *wanted* to be disqualified.

"I am the Christ." Thomas didn't think so. His homies had told him that Jesus was raised from the dead. The disciples had seen the risen Christ and they assured Thomas that it was true. Thomas wasn't having any of it. "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (John 20:25). At that moment, Thomas wasn't doing a bang-up job identifying the Christ. How about you? To Tell the Truth... can you pick out the real Messianic King? Let's do a little exercise. I'll give you some biblical words that identify the Messiah and y'all respond with "Jesus is the Christ." "My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:8). **Jesus is the Christ.** "Though I was rich yet for your sake I became poor so that you, by my poverty, might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). **Jesus is the Christ.** "I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys to Death and Hades" (Revelation 1:17-18). **Jesus is the Christ.**

Will the real Christ please stand up? That's what Jesus was doing when He spoke the beatitudes, when He pronounced the reality that constitutes blessedness. Jesus was telling the whole world who He was when He preached that sermon, The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). I am the Christ. "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:3). Poor in spirit is synonymous to humble, modest, a person who readily puts others in front of themselves (Philippians 2:1-11). One who is poor in spirit would gladly wash His disciples' feet (John 13). Jesus is the Christ. Blessed are the meek. Jesus has told you, told all those on the celebrity panel: "Come to me, all who are weak and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). Jesus is the Blessed One (Romans 9:5). He is the embodiment of all the beatitudes. Jesus is the Christ. Can you identify Him?

Do those beatitudes describe you? *Why* do they describe you? There are imposters, you know, fakers. Some folks lie their lips off. Some do it knowingly; some are just under a theological delusion. Imposters will tell you that blessedness is something that you achieve by your behavior. Behave well, be really, really good and then you may be called blessed. Is that what you believe? Do you believe that the blessed are rich and handsome and on tele? Do you believe that the blessed are holier than other believers, that they ooze perfection, that they never fail, never doubt, never endure difficulty? A messianic imposter would direct you to your own behavior in order to assure you of your blessedness. Those who don't understand grace, those who make Christianity a club for the self-righteous, those who don't take a good look at Jesus on the cross – they will direct you to an imposter, a false messiah, a god who is dreamed up out of their own religious imagination.

Nicodemus, Peter, and Thomas – they all came around. Nicodemus took Jesus' corpse down from the cross. Picture that! Tears streaming from his eyes, Nicodemus holds the limp body of the Savior in his arms and can't you hear him whisper... you are the Christ. Peter jumped out of a boat and swam to the resurrected Jesus on the shore. The Lord asked him, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15). Peter replied: "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you" (John 21:15). In Peter's head the words dance with complete certainty: "You are the Christ." Thomas was confronted by the Lord and His wounds. Put your finger here, reach out your hand and put it in my side. Stop doubting and believe (John 20:27). Thomas speaks for all of us on the celebrity panel: "My Lord and my God." I give you my body to eat and my blood to drink (Matthew 26:26-28). **Jesus is the Christ.** "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:3). **Jesus is the Christ.** My blood has washed you of your sin and you are holy (Ephesians 5:26-27). **Jesus is the Christ.**

He is the Blessed One. All those beatitudes refer to Him but they also refer to you. He is the vine and you are the branch. "If a man remains in me and I in him he will produce much fruit" (John 15:5). Jesus said that because the Christ intends to place His blessedness in you. That new man, in you, that new man which God has brought to life in you, that new man is the real you. Sin is the imposter, living in you. St. Paul, lamenting the bad things that he does, said this: "So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me" (Romans 7:17). Pride, lust, greed and deceit – those are imposters. We crucify the old man, putting him and his evil desires to death. We renounce the idea that we live for ourselves, that we live for the moment, that we

worship and serve created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). We trust Christ and His Word. His Word tells us that we are blessed. Why? Why are we the blessed? Because we have been crucified with Christ and we no longer live but Christ lives in us and the life we live in the body we live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself up for us (Galatians 2:20).

What is the opposite of blessed? The opposite of blessed is cursed. Wiley Smith deserves to be cursed. I have not loved God above all things nor have I loved my neighbor as myself. I have done so very much worse. Cursed; to suffer the just wrath of the Almighty, a horrible ignominy, a wretched end, a shameful and public humiliation, death and hell – I deserve that; sin, my sin, has earned me that. Will the real Christ please stand up? The Son of God took His place on the Holy Cross and He became a curse, for it is written cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree (Galatians 3:13). The real Christ died in my stead. The real Christ took your sin upon Himself and suffered its judgment. What do you say in reply? Blessed is He, blessed is He, blessed is He! Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth, for you have had mercy on us poor sinners. Jesus is the Christ. He pronounces you blessed this day – every single one of you (blessed with forgiveness, life, salvation). Never forget it. Those who are in Christ have all that He is. To Tell the Truth – the real Christ the King stands tall in this place and we are blessed to be in Him.