

+ Luke 6:20-23 + Series: Blessed... + Theme: Blessed Are Those Who Hope! +
+ Festival of All Saints + 6 November 2016 +

108 years of waiting and hoping and wishing ended in a moment. Just before 1 AM on Thursday, with two outs and a runner on, Michael Martinez of the Cleveland Indians hit a slow grounder towards third base. Chicago Cubs third baseman Kris Bryant hustled to field the grounder on the wet grass. He picked up the ball and fired a throw to first baseman Anthony Rizzo, who gloved it cleanly. The game was over. Bedlam ensued as grown men in bright blue mobbed each other. Rizzo and Bryant leaped about three feet off the ground in celebration. A roar of joy went out from countless Cubs fans all over the world, because they had finally won.

108 years had passed since the last time the Chicago Cubs had won the World Series. That's long enough for an entire generation of fans to be born, live a life full of years, and die without seeing their favorite team win it all. Cubs fans always seemed to have plenty of wishful thinking to go around. "Cheer up! Just wait 'til next year!" only to see the wheels fall off again and again, that is, until the final out early Thursday morning. Many celebrated with family members young and old. Many visited the graves of loved ones who used to cheer for the Cubs or wrote their names in chalk on the brick walls outside of Wrigley Field. A century of hoping and wishing was finally over.

Hoping and wishing are part of being a fan. For many, you hope that your team can build on past success and win it all again. For others, you hope to see something your generation of fans has never seen—your team winning it all for the first time in years, even decades, or for the first time ever.

That kind of hope can be one of the most enjoyable and most excruciating parts of being a fan, but in the end, that kind of hope is only wishful thinking. A bounce of the ball here. A slip on the grass there, and it's a different story. We wish for victory much like we wish for good weather or a good day. The hope of a fan is fun, but it is not hope that is certain, that is solid, that lasts.

This morning we celebrate the Festival of All Saints. No, we're not celebrating all those fans who passed away without seeing their team win. We're not even celebrating those believers who seemed extraordinary in how well they followed Jesus—those who have been designated "saints" even though every believer made holy by Christ is a "saint" in his eyes. It's not so much who we're celebrating, but what. You see, this morning, Jesus speaks of hope, but it's a different kind of hope. It's hope that lasts.

We find Jesus early in his first year of public ministry. After his baptism, he began teaching and preaching. He began healing many. He called twelve men to be his closest followers so he could personally train them for Gospel ministry. With these disciples in tow, Jesus went out to a level place where he met a large crowd of people who had traveled from all over to see him. They hoped to hear him teach or have him heal them or a loved one.

Jesus didn't disappoint. He was healing many, when he began teaching his disciples who were gathered there. What he said at first probably shocked his hearers. He started out with four statements of blessing, but they weren't what you'd expect to hear. They were paradoxes of hope. They sound contradictory to human nature, but they're not just wishful thinking.

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Surely there were many there who were literally poor, economically disadvantaged. They came to Jesus looking for answers, looking for help, looking for hope in their time of need. Jesus was providing help to those who were sick or hurting or helpless, so they figured he could help them.

Yet throughout that crowd, even among those who were economically poor, there was an even bigger problem—a problem that every one of us has no matter where we're at financially. It wasn't so much the lack of earthly possessions, but rather the love of earthly possessions. All people are naturally minded towards holding on to and gaining more of the things of this life, but what happens to those things no matter how valuable, no matter how precious? They pass away. They disappear. They get lost or stolen or broken or end up in somebody else's hands, but yet we keep on greedily grasping for more and more things in this life.

What were people thinking when Jesus said, ***"Blessed are you who are poor..."***? Blessed? The word can also mean "happy" or "favored." God favors the poor? Really? Jesus was speaking of a different kind of poverty—not simply the lack of possessions, but the realization that through him, we lack nothing no matter how much or how little we have. ***"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."***

Rather than put your wishful hope in possessions that pass away, by faith you and I put our hope in Jesus. You realize that in Christ you actually have the full grace and love of God. In Christ, you are blessed—no matter your financial situation—because you are under the rule of your heavenly King and in him alone you have true happiness. Even losing your possessions cannot rob you of hope because you have true joy in Christ rather than in earthly things. Your hope and mine is different because the kingdom of God is ours through Jesus Christ—and we will see it in full someday. Blessed are those who have their hope in the King who gives us his kingdom!

Jesus offered another paradox of hope. ***“Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.”*** Surely there were people there who were dealing with real hunger in their lives and the lives of their loved ones. You could look at that statement and figure that Jesus is simply going to give you everything you want. He could become a “Bread King” like the crowds wanted him to be after he fed over 5,000 people, but that’s not why he came.

No, Jesus came to give the hope of satisfaction for hungry souls, for people whose most desperate need is more than just physical hunger even as he provides for their physical needs. As our gracious and loving God, he will not forsake his people just as Mary, the mother of Jesus, sang, ***“He has filled the hungry with good things.”*** (Luke 1:53) Jesus came to provide those ***“good things”*** to hungry souls—to provide righteousness for sinful beggars like us, to provide forgiveness for guilty souls like ours, to satisfy our natural hunger for what the world around us cannot provide—peace and reconciliation with our God. It’s no wonder that the Old Testament prophet Isaiah longed to see the feast that God promised to spread out for free on his holy mountain—a beautiful picture of the heaven to come. In Revelation, we hear about the never-ending feast of the Lamb of God where hunger and thirst exist no more. Blessed are those who have their hope in such a satisfying Savior!

Jesus offered yet another paradox of hope. ***“Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.”*** Surely there were many in that crowd who had lost loved ones, who had wept at gravesites, who had shed tears of sadness because of loss or affliction or distress they had endured. Yet Jesus calls them ***“blessed.”*** Why? Jesus came to give the hope of comfort and joy to grieving souls. Jesus came to dry tears because he is the resurrection and the life. Jesus came to overcome death and the grave by his own death and resurrection, so God’s people, including you and me, would one day go where there will be no more weeping or crying or pain, where there will only be joy and laughter and celebration, where God’s holy people will drink the eternally fresh waters of life and rejoice.

Even now, Jesus satisfies our thirst with those waters of life from his Word and Sacraments. For that reason, even though we suffer affliction and distress, we will never lack comfort in Jesus. You see, eternal laughter follows weeping in this life and lasting joy in Jesus follows momentary sorrow. Blessed are those who have their hope in the comforting Christ!

Jesus’ final paradox of hope has always sounded strange to believers’ ears. In fact, it might even make you nervous and fill you with anxiety, but even then Jesus gives hope. ***“Blessed are you when others hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.”*** To put it simply, Jesus says that you and I are blessed in God’s eyes when we suffer for his sake, when others hate us or exclude us or insult us or drag our names through the mud because we follow Jesus. Facing personal animosity because you follow Jesus is probably one of the hardest struggles that a Christian can face. Why? It’s so tempting to just compromise or quit. Christians of every age have faced such hatred and exclusion and insult and slander for the sake of Christ. Many have quit, but many others remained faithful as they followed their Savior beneath the cross. The battle for their souls was fierce, but Jesus won because he endured it all first so you and I would be blessed in the eyes of the holy God.

...But what does Jesus say to nervous saints like you and me? ***“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.”*** Rejoice? Rejoice because I’m hated or insulted or excluded or slandered? Jesus would say, “Yes! And don’t just rejoice. Leap for joy like a calf coming out of its stall for the first time in the spring. Leap and rejoice, because even though people hate you and persecute you because you follow me, I make up for all that with my gracious love for you! Not only do I give you my kingdom of grace, but I have gifts of my grace waiting for all who remain faithful to me, all who keep struggling and striving, all who finish the race well. Every generation of my saints has struggled and every generation after you will struggle beneath the cross too, but blessed are you who find your hope in me, who remain faithful to me, who long to see heaven someday.” So when the battle is fierce and the warfare long, saints like you and me look heavenward and we hear the distant triumph song. We long

with real hope to see the new heaven and new earth, where there will be no more hatred or pain or sorrow or hunger or death, just eternal life in the love of Jesus.

This past Friday, an estimated 5 million people filled the streets of Chicago to celebrate the Cubs victory. It was a sight to behold. The joy of all those fans was tremendous, but even that amazing celebration doesn't compare to the joy that awaits God's saints in the glories of heaven. There we will see countless believers from every nation, tribe, and language rejoicing in the eternal victory of the Lamb of God. So even now we can rejoice. You see, our hope is in the Lord who has made us blessed. Our hope is in the King who has given us his kingdom. Our hope is in Christ who satisfies our hunger and turns our weeping into laughter. Our hope is in the Lord who gives us strength in trouble and victory for all eternity. Blessed are all you saints who hope in Christ! Amen.