

Luke 6:20-26

The State of the Union address, the most recent one you may have watched a few weeks ago, can be classified first as a state of being; second as a state of becoming. A state of being describes the present. A state of becoming looks to the future. A good political speech will include both; where we are today and where we are heading. Using these terms, which Martin Luther used, we can get a better picture of Jesus' words in our text.

"Blessed are you who are poor," He says, *"for yours is the kingdom of God."* This is in the present tense. This is your state of being. Right now at this very moment you are blessed, having the kingdom of God, because you are poor. Poor? Yes, though not in a worldly sense. There were many people in Jesus' day who were not blessed for they rejected Jesus, and so they were not in the kingdom of God. In the Greek the word poor here refers to being a beggar. Not one who can work for a living, but one who is so destitute that he must beg.

This perfectly describes the Christian. Christians are those who have no work of their own which they can offer to God. They are dirt poor. They came from the dirt and will return to the dirt. And their entire existence is lived in this framework of humility. A Christian is insignificant in his own eyes. The hands of a Christian are never full but always empty. The moment a Christian sees himself offering his works, his goodness and piety to God, hands filled with these, he ceases to be poor and has become rich. But it is not the rich; only the poor who are blessed, having the kingdom of God.

If you agree that this is your state of being; that before God you are poor, nothing but a beggar, then this is of faith. This is God at work in you. And you are blessed, for He fills your empty hands with His good gifts. He gives you Christ Jesus, and with Christ all that you need for this life and for the life to come.

But even having all these gifts from God, you remain a poor beggar. How can we not? For we daily see our sins; our failures, weaknesses, and shortcomings. We are never able to lift ourselves out of our poverty. We can only receive. Faith only receives. And thus we always hunger for what God places into our empty hands.

"Blessed are you who are hungry now," says Jesus, *"for you shall be satisfied."* And so your present state, as one who is poor, is to be one who hungers. The rich, who are full of themselves, will not and cannot hunger as do the poor. You know the feeling when your belly is so full that nothing appeals anymore. You do not want another bite of food. When that food is Christ and His Gospel, this is sad. I don't understand, nor I'm sure do you, how people can go weeks, months, even years without coming to hear Jesus' words of life; without so much as desiring them; and having no appetite at all for the food on the altar.

But this analogy does help me to understand slightly. When someone is physically hungry, he craves food for his stomach. And he does not allow anything to stop him from eating the food he desires. These people are blessed, says Jesus, who hunger in this way for the gifts God gives in Christ; for His Word and Sacraments. They *"shall be satisfied,"* He says. Only in heaven will we be full. *"Your reward in heaven will be great,"* says Jesus. Until then we hunger and we never stop hungering. This hunger is from God. Your hunger for Christ and His Gospel is, in fact, how He leads you to heaven. Thank God that you desire to eat the food of the Gospel in Word and Sacrament.

Our Lord then says, *"Blessed are you who weep now."* Those who are poor, and who are hungry now, will also weep now in the present. This is your state of being as a Christian; one who is poor, hungry,

and who weeps. Billy Joel sings this song lyric which you may have heard, *“I’d rather laugh with the sinners than cry with the saints.”* But he is no theologian. For those who are blessed are not necessarily those who cry a lot in life; who are always downcast and depressed. Laughter is a gift of God. Being happy is a good thing. We’re not monks of the Middle Ages who go around all day acting as if there is no joy in Mudville. God wants us to be joyful; yes, to smile in life. Our weeping is not external but internal. We weep on account of our sinfulness. As Christians we despise the fact that we hurt our loving God by our sins. Our internal weeping is simply repentant sorrow.

And we also weep and we grieve by what we see in the world around us. “Lord have mercy” we cry with internal tears. For we live in a world, a society that despises the Gospel. Jesus warns Joel and those who agree with his song, *“Woe to you who laugh now;”* who laugh with the sinners, who enjoy sin while they can and have no desire to repent. But you who weep now shall laugh. This is Jesus’ promise. Your reward in heaven will be great.

You’ll be hated for all this. The world hates Jesus and will hate you. But He reminds you that God’s prophets were hated and mistreated. If the world loves us, we’re in trouble. For the world loves those who are false prophets. The world loves its own. But you are not of the world. You are born of God’s kingdom. You belong to Jesus. You therefore are blessed.

Now in the State of the Union address, if the only state that is mentioned is the state of being, it would be a lousy speech. We the people need to know where we are in the present, but it is essential that we’re told where we are heading. How can we move forward if we do not look to the future?

And as Christians, we too must look forward. St. Paul puts it this way in Philippians: *“I press on...because Christ Jesus has made me His own...one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”*

This is your state of becoming. Christ Jesus has also made you His own in your baptism. Here in the water and word is the kingdom of God, and herein lies your future reward. Though poor, you are given the riches of the Gospel. Though hungry, Christ fills you with His gifts. Weeping, yet you have joy. You and I are always in the process of becoming. We live in the present, but we strain forward with eyes of hope set on the goal. We are always in the state of becoming.

You have a Savior who became sin for you. He became poor, emptying Himself to the point of death on a cross. Your reward is not, therefore, here in the present, but awaits you in heaven. The only people who live for the present are those who are not Christians. They are rich now. They are full now. They laugh now. Their reward is here and now. But your reward is coming thanks to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

And it’s guaranteed. You and I are imperfect. We daily make a mess of our life. We are nothing but poor, hungry, weepy beggars. But also forgiven beggars. God despises the rich and sends them away empty-handed. But to you who are poor beggars He shows mercy. He forgives you. Yes, all of you. All of it in your past is forgiven. And He gives you His kingdom.

So wherever you are, whatever your lot in life, whatever your present situation, you are in the process of becoming. In Christ you have a glorious future. You have a great reward. Look forward and press on with hope. Amen.