



The Lutherans have a problem. There are far too many of them who take these so-called Beatitudes to heart: so much so that these Lutherans do not believe the words are meant to stay on Bible pages. No, these problematic Lutherans believe that Jesus is still speaking “Blessed are you who are poor or hungry or weep” in Cleveland and Toledo and Green Bay and Chicago and New York and everywhere in between and beyond. And these Lutherans are so moved by these so-called Beatitudes that they believe that it doesn’t stop there: but that they are being called by God to be part of the helping the weep laugh, and feeding the hungry,

and encouraging the supposedly blessed poor to believe that the very paradise of God belongs to them.

But the other problem with these Lutherans is that they don’t like to stop reading their precious Scriptures after just nine verses. They continue to dive in with personal devotion time and Bible studies and maybe even a sermon or two along the way for the fun of it. And they start to notice that the supposedly almighty all-powerful God made a most intentional choice in arriving more deeply to all humanity as the son of a carpenter. And that in a relatively short period of time of directly ministering to our vulnerable humanity, he spent a rather inordinate amount of time with the poor and the hungry and the weeping, and not just for a sermon or a pat on the back and telling them that it’s all going to turn out fine in a far-off heavenly paradise. Instead, the supposedly almighty all-powerful God wanted to do the basic but most holy helping the weep laugh and feed the hungry and to ensure that the poor realize that the very paradise of God’s love for them was meant to be experienced right then and there.

And so, the problem with these Lutherans, is that they get so caught up in this hope. And they get so spellbound by the possibility of ushering in a bit of God’s paradise here and now. And they wonder that as much as they crave their own devotion time and Bible studies and maybe a sermon or two, just for fun, that there might be just as much of a Holy Spirit jolt when they put all their precious learnings into practice: to see the Beatitudes come to life on a most transformational level that will stick with them through all their lives.

But the Lutherans didn’t just come up with this in any of our lifetimes. It goes all the way back to their motherland. And ever since, the Lutherans have realized the greatest impact can be made not just with individuals or even single congregations, but when they pool their resources together; they just might be able to pull off an even larger piece of paradise, especially for those who wonder if God would ever want them to be a part of it.

And the other problem is that as much as people wonder if our Lutheran church as a whole is fading, that there are actually still quite a few around, enough to support these most pivotal social service agencies: a combined effort of these problematic Lutherans who keep on falling in love with hope and wanting to share it with their neighbors and beyond. Some of that most valuable ministry of those agencies you saw before the worship, but I want to tell you about another one with Lutheran Social Services of Central Ohio, including a paradise location in Lancaster.

There was a woman named Brandy, whose marriage fell apart, and she turned to drugs as a means to cope with her understandable anguish. It became an addiction that led to her sleeping in her car and eating out of trash cans to survive. She wondered if there was any hope for her. She struggled with believing there was a god out there who could love her. She wasn’t sure her life was worth living anymore. But then there was the Faith Mission of Fairfield County, supported by the hope-loving problematic Lutherans of central Ohio. Two months of treatment in the sober living program and Brandy

said in her own words, that “Coming to Lutheran Social Services has been one of the best decisions that I have ever made. The people that work here have been my biggest supporters. They have given me motivation: a most positive influence.”

The Lutherans have a problem. Amidst a world filled with hate and rage, they want to keep on proclaiming the Greatest News of the Gospel. The Lutherans have another problem: being that the majority of them are descendants of Germans and Swedes and Norwegians, they are some of the most stubborn children of God around. So, as much as they are told about fading denominations and who knows what for individual congregation life, they’re so incredibly stubborn in still wanting to bring a bit more of the paradise of God out of the Biblical pages and into the here and now. That maybe the Beatitudes can be just as beautiful in our own backyards of God’s Creation.

And so, with these problematic Lutherans, instead of keeping their money to themselves to live their own lives to the fullest or to increase their home church’s budget for as long as they can, they’ll instead insist on pooling their resources together, because they have this sneaking holy feeling that that is what the carpenter’s son would thoroughly crave. And in places like Lancaster, Ohio, they will take that money and run: run to the substance abuse shelters to the people who aren’t so sure they deserve another breath on this earth. They’ll take the money and run in Green Bay, Wisconsin, to a veteran living on the street, so that he might have a roof over his head. They’ll take it and run in Los Angeles, so that someone whose whole livelihood was eviscerated by a wildfire, might still have some hope after all. They’ll all run with as much fervor for life as that son of a carpenter did out a tomb that was meant to shut him up forever. The problem is the world couldn’t then, and it still can’t now, and not far behind will be the most stubborn Lutherans you’ll ever see. Because there’s just too much hope and love and grace running around within them, as if Christ is still Risen indeed. So, for that Greatest news of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!