

Rachel Gerber
Senior Sermon
February 4, 2011

Matthew 5

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.

The beatitudes are an extremely well-known set of scripture that many can interpret differently. In fact, after my message, the choir will offer their interpretation of the beatitudes through song in Latin. Now I won't be giving my sermon in a foreign language but I want to give my interpretation of this incredibly accepting, loving, and grace-filled proclamation by Jesus.

Although the call to be "pure in heart" and "peaceful" seems to be an individual challenge, the love of God cannot be earned that way. As we focus on what we lack, as a Christian community, we can piece together our gifts to create a human definition of the pure of heart. Let me elaborate.

My faith journey has brought me to various places in my life. I have experienced the powerful faith of adults and peer from my hometown, various views of South Dakotans, beliefs of professors, peers, advisors, and staff, views of high school campers and camp staff, my family's beliefs, both Catholic and Missouri Synod, and a school's core values of Lutheran Christianity. I have encountered people who are doubting, scared, and angry with God. I have seen those who have unfailing faith, who are forgiving, and who have unconditional love.

How can these pieces co-exist within me? Sometimes, the Christ-like person I'm trying to be, exists with or between other people

As Christians, we vow to live like Christ, to be pure of heart in all aspects of our lives. . . But what happens when we discover the difficulty in acting out that so called purity?

Those of you who know me best would say I'm not exactly pure of heart. I'm a bit of a plan-a-holic. I have an obsession with organization and lists. This lifestyle, does not conform with many of the people that surround me. Some friends know that I have a sleep walking/talking problem. Teasing ensues when sleep conversations or songs are extended far too long without my knowledge. Again, anger is an emotion that builds when I finally snap out of it. Like anyone else, I can be jealous, self-centered, and impatient.

But the moment the plan falls apart or the angry half-asleep Rachel wakes up, a friend is typically there to shake me up a bit, letting me know it will all be ok. The trust of a strong relationship can make all the difference. The fresh perspective is the pure hearted act in the midst of a breakdown.

Often, purity of heart can be found in the most unexpected places. I have a good friend who I met my first year in my work study. She recognized a time when I was struggling to feel a sense of family here at Augie. With some prying, she discovered early on that I was a huge Survivor fan. This gave her a chance to invite me over for dinner and before I knew it years have past. In this time she extended her faith, her family, her home, and her heart to me. She is someone who I have learned the value of tradition and Christ's giving heart. That piece of me was missing, but through my relationship with her, I have been linked to God through our connection.

I have had countless conversations with great people at Augie, and have learned after that our views greatly differ from a Christian perspective. I have discovered that many of my most valuable friends are the ones that present new ideas and perspectives. One particular friend was Buddhist and was a very active volunteer. That summer at camp, in teaching my campers about the God's love, I felt a strong desire to include my Buddhist friend in the mix. Considering the blessing of the peacemakers in the Beatitudes, he will receive the kingdom of heaven.

We each embody our perspective and beliefs. We are pieces of the "purity of heart" the Psalm discusses. But the recognition of rest of the pieces makes us a living definition of purity of heart. We cannot be Christ, by identifying our weaknesses and making ourselves vulnerable to relationships, we open our hearts to receive the rest of the pieces. Even then, we cannot be whole, we are not pure, because we are human. Christ fills in the cracks with his mercy, allowing those with a human, sinful heart, to be redeemed.

For those of you who are Seniors, the future lingers on the horizon. Like you, I'm feeling the pressure of the uncertainty ahead. It seems that many who ask the question, 'What are

you gonna do with your life?’ are expecting a perfect plan to be recited, a plan to have it all. With this living definition of purity, I’m proud to say that I don’t have that plan. I have pieces of it, I have pieces of what I believe to be true, what I believe to be good, what I want.

But being a simple human being, I have to recognize the importance of others in my life. They help me to understand my own weaknesses and to fill in some strengths. Together, with Christ’s love, we are whole and true. We must learn to love and appreciate one another’s ways of spiritual fulfillment to become good ourselves.

For me, the truth in purity of heart can be embodied in the fleeting moments of life. Just this last week, the choir went on our Interim Tour and met a woman named Laddie who is a 104 yr old Augie Choir Alum. As we sang for her, she mouthed the words to ‘Were you there’ and ‘Amazing Grace’ right along with us. As I struggled to keep it together, I was thinking about the life she had led. What was she thinking at this moment? Did she regret the choices she had made in life? Was she worried about getting into heaven? Should I be worried?

But after reading the scripture for today, I know that worrying is a waste of time. When we doubt, we must remember that God will take the pieces of our lives that were good and form those into our eternal being.

Those who understand that God is present in relationships, the pieces of our life that brings us joy, in those who love us unconditionally, those who present new perspectives and views, those who are true to themselves and the sacredness of friendship, they are the pure of heart.

Amen.