

St. Luke's Episcopal Church
The Fourth Sunday After Epiphany
January 29, 2017
Matthew 5:1-12
The Reverend John P. Carr

The Beatitudes

In the Beatitudes, Jesus instructs his disciples to live by a new vision of humility and new standards. This new vision requires relinquishing control and a vision of power as important things in life. It requires a new perspective and a complete re-vision of attitude and purpose.

This new view that Jesus is expressing to his disciples on the mountainside turns the conventional world upside down. Instead of the power in life arising in man, Jesus points out that spiritual strength comes from surrender and dependence on God entirely. Jesus does not hold up the powerful or the well-connected as the models for his disciples but those who are the weakest, the humble, the forgiving, the pure, those instead who set their lives on righteousness and those who have suffered for his sake.

This view even seems a bit revolutionary today doesn't it? Let's go with Jesus up the mountain and see what he was saying and what we can learn.

First let's learn a little about the Greek language because it is very important in understanding the meaning of what Jesus was teaching. This is a revolutionary text and we need to understand what Jesus actually meant as best we can.

- The word bless'ed or blessed is used today as if something good has happened to us, as in "*How are you?*" and the response is "*I am blessed.*" They might really mean that "I am grateful." The Greek word, *ma-kari-oi*, has a different meaning than how blessed is used today. It means to be "*fully satisfied*". In the context of this reading it means "*to experience the joy that comes from salvation*"¹. It can only come from a person being fully in Christ, and God through Christ being fully in the person. It does not mean lucky, fortunate, happy or favorable circumstances, it means that one is fully spiritually satisfied in Christ.
- "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*" What does that mean? Not what you may think. It does not mean impoverished. It does not mean something kind of sad but more like *zippity do da!*, praise the blessedness of the poor in spirit. This poorness is a great asset.

It is a recognition of the poor in spirit having made the journey to the right place with God. This Greek word for poor is not our word for poor. It means a lower state than that! It literally means "*poor and helpless, one who is abject and needs lifting.*"

This blessedness is a celebration that a person has reached that point of helplessness. It is a realization that they can't make it on their own. They acknowledge that they depend entirely on the Lord for everything from spiritual to material.

They have reached that point of helplessness that enables them to detach from the material and attach to the holy.

- *“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”* This is mourning in the sense of grief for having disappointed God. This mourning is repentance for one’s own sin or that of the people. It is a sickness at heart for having strayed from the course intended for you. The comfort is in the forgiveness received for the repentance given.
- *“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”* This meekness is revealed in self-control. Think of Jesus, he was meek but He was strong. Or think of Jesus or of Ghandi, the same applies. Self control is one of the fruits of the spirit as opposed to weakness.

Human weakness is based in fear and indecision and far from God. With God, we are not weak but secure. The secure person is wise and self-controlled rather than impulsive, arrogant and violent. The weak will inherit the earth. You have only to look at history to see who the survivors are. You need only to look to the dinosaurs and the mammals! In the end, the wise, the meek, the loving are the ones who prevail.

- *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”* When we have hunger or thirst our body is telling us that we do not have enough of something we need. The Greek means, *“the hungry ones.”* They are the ones hungering for the righteousness of God. The hunger they feel can only be satisfied by God.

- *“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”*
Those who show mercy will receive mercy. It is that little word *AS* again. Jesus is showing that mercy will be given as it is given by us.

Mercy will be given to those who are merciful. This is also an echo of the Lord’s Prayer in its reference to forgiveness. Forgive us our trespasses *AS* we forgive others. When we forgive, we are merciful, we are filled with mercy. We are modeling the love, and mercy of God when we forgive.

- *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”*
The pure in heart are those who have put all their being into the hands of God. God fills their hearts and directs their actions. The poor in spirit are the pure in heart. They have emptied their hearts so that they can be filled.

This is the “all in” condition. When we are “all in” for Jesus and follow His Way, we will experience His way of living, we will be pure in heart and receive our reward in the hereafter.

- *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”* We have just endured and are enduring a remarkable national election that has in many ways brought out the best and worst of our nation’s people. Regardless of which side you may have favored or if you were on the sideline, you have seen and continue to see a lack of *peace* between people.

Consider this as a change of paradigm. What if we greeted one another with *“peace be with you,”* as we do in the exchange of the Peace in our service? How different would the nation and world be if the first words to one another, especially those with whom we do not agree, were *“PEACE BE WITH YOU?”*

The old song, “What the world needs now is love sweet love,” captures the essence of this peace found in love. What we need is peace, what we need is love, what we need is the love of God in our hearts.

- When there is not love,
- when there is not peace,
- when there is not mercy,
- when there is not a hunger for righteousness,
- when there is not self-control and repentance,
- when there is no dependence on God,

then there is no blessing, there is no satisfaction.

But when these do exist, there is hope. Even though we may be persecuted, marginalized, made fun of for our faith, or even die for our faith, there is hope. There is a reward for those who persevere in the faith.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus is calling our attention to the relinquishment of control of our lives to live by God’s rules, by God’s will. He is calling us to be poor in spirit, to depend on God for our material and spiritual lives.

God's way is not the way of the world. When we follow God, life is different than what the world expects.

With God's way, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and the expression of that filling of the Holy Spirit is that we love, that we forgive and are merciful and all the expressions in life of love, forgiveness and mercy will flow from us to those around us.

We will have become the hands of Christ in the world when we turn our hearts over to God and become truly as blessed as the poor in spirit.

Amen

1. Footnotes p. 1181 Key Word Study Bible, Strongs