

Mat 5 1-12

But what is it to be a saint in today's world...to die to the narrow ideologies of the world and even die to one's own ego?

A few years back I had the privilege of sitting on the actual Mount of the beatitudes. It's a natural amphitheater overlooking the water where Jesus gave this teaching to literally the poor and powerless folks living in the fishing villages there on the Northern Sea of Galilee. A young pastor recited the entire sermon from memory and pointed to everything mentioned in Matthew's Gospel. (You should read it in its entirety to get the full effect).

As we sat there up on that hill we could see and experience with all our senses what Jesus was talking about. Jesus was introducing his students to this idea of the kingdom of God or Heaven...and from a visual standpoint he was physically within sight of the Kingdom of Herod to his right and the Kingdom of Caesar to his left...their kingdoms' of worldly Power at that time.

And the reality that Jesus describes didn't conform to the way they thought about their world...this was a complete surprise to them and certainly still is for us today. God's vision for creation is so much more inclusive and loving than the way we tend to see things.

The Beatitudes are the beginning of the Sermon on the Mt...and they convey not only the nature of Heaven but more importantly the character of its citizens...we may call them saints.

The Beatitudes are a deeper wisdom for those of us that believe things work a certain way! As we have talked about time and time again we know that the way we see things isn't really the way God sees them. In fact, in today's world the Kingdom of Man can be in direct opposition to Heaven. But that's really nothing new is it? As Mel Brooks once said "It's good to be the King!" It's always ever been about where Power lies.

And here in the Kingdom of America, to be honest, most of us don't really buy into the Kingdom of God stuff at all...we talk a good game when it suits us but that's kinda where it ends.

Maybe deep down we are too rooted in the ways of man and our own day-to-day worldly cares. It is truly a hard thing to live as Jesus taught us... especially when it doesn't serve our own best interests.

And the fact that we live in a divisive...us vs them...“information overload”...“all about me...World” doesn't help matters.

The Beatitudes were pretty shocking back then – and they still are today...It's an upside-down way of looking at things to us. Power, Wealth and Survival rule the day in this kingdom!

...and that even extends to the way we see God...Victorious armies... sports heroes, and even our own nation claims God as the source of our power and conquests...raping, pillaging and killing all in God's name!

The assumption we make is that God acts in the world from a position of power – from above - top down. And this thinking pervades our wisdom as it indeed did in First Century Israel.

Quoting that great philosopher Jimmy Hendrix “when the power of love overcomes our love of power - only then will we have peace...well he was onto something there and these Beatitudes point to that kinda reality!

Not from a place of power but exactly the opposite. Did you ever notice the people we revere most as saints...like Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa, Desmond Tutu, the Dali Lama, Martin Luther King!

They all share an inner peace - whether facing lions or demons or earthly suffering...they all shared that inner peace that the world can never give...nor ever take away!

Now that kind of peace – that Shalom - only comes from being connected to the creator of the universe! And that peace begets a profound sense of oneness! A sacred connectedness to all things... living into the present moment in awe and gratitude...blessed regardless of our circumstances!

The Hebrew word used for blessing here is the word “ashar” which means to find the right path. Jesus is calling His disciples to walk the right path. Jesus is describing discipleship as the journey itself...the walking upon the road...An each of the nine blessings are road signs pointing us along our way...

Not only to FOLLOW but to walk WITH Christ upon this road. The Beatitudes are the essence, the lifeblood, the beating heart of an authentic Christian life.

And this blessedness is not static, but progressive. In Jesus’ nine statements we see each condition building upon the one before it. Therefore, the foundation from which they all flow is the first one ...being poor in spirit...and Jesus and his followers were literally and figuratively poor... they had no allegiances to any of the kingdoms in power.

In Greek this describes someone who is poor and helpless. The first step in blessedness, then, is first realizing one’s allegiance and total reliance upon God. That our life must be rooted and grounded first in our dependence and relationship with God! Love God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength. This is called - Putting God First...and at our center...not so easy to do in practice!

The next Greek word translated as mourn describes mourning over the death of someone very close to us – Sorrow!

This is sorrow over the loss of that which we all hold most dear, our worldly attachments and our ego. We must mourn the loss of our power and possessions in this world...the self-centeredness dwelling within our own hearts.

So flowing from this then is the Greek word translated as meek...the idea of someone willing to see things from God's perspective instead of their own. At this stage folks begin to act with Compassion and Empathy... sharing in the "others" point of view.

The meek are those who are selfless... becoming conduits of God's grace flowing through them... pouring that grace into the world and extending that grace to others.

Then there's "those who hunger and thirst" could better be translated as "the hungry ones." People who hunger for God's will to be done...not my will be done! God's Righteousness...Not self-righteous! Not judgement and condemnation... but Hungering for justice and the kingdom of God revealed in communion with God through others.

Then we have the merciful... caring for those in misery. They take the world's hurts and make them their own. They feel empathy and compassion for the world...this is not something they do to find mercy, but rather are merciful because of Christ being born within them.

"Christlikeness" is developing in the hearts of Jesus' disciples as they walk this journey... becoming more and more like their teacher!

Back then it was called walking in the dust of your Rabbi...you followed your teacher to actually become like your teacher!

A pure heart then speaks of God's Spirit made manifest within them... and what is their promise? That they will see God!

In fact, if Christ dwells within you... then they can't help but see God all over the place! In everyone and in everything around them. They themselves now perceive and then reveal the kingdom of God to others.

The disciple who is growing in Christlikeness ultimately finds peace!

...and as a result, they birth this shalom into the world! They reveal the hope and the light of Christ to the world.

And God's ways are not Man's ways... So those in power don't really like the masses depending upon God and others... Instead they need the masses depending on them and giving them that power instead... so living this way can often result in being persecuted!

If we follow Jesus and live in right relationship with God and others, then we will likely be targeted by the status quo... the "in" group... the group in power.

So the Beatitudes express for us this idea that this reality... comes from people who are characterized by their poverty of spirit, their ability to mourn for the world, their lack of attachments or clinging to self-worth, their hunger for the healing of the world, their extreme mercy extended even towards their enemies, and their purity of heart.

See Change always begins first and foremost on the inside... doesn't it?! First we have to breathe in... then we can breathe out!

And once we are transformed, then this newfound reality moves out from us and into the world. Note that true Christians have always been persecuted throughout history because they usually tend to challenge the status quo... the way things have always been done...

They make those that benefit from the current system of power “uncomfortable”... Christians challenge those in power to be better and more inclusive...to act from a place of Love and the OTHER rather than acting from a place of fear and it’s all about me!

The Beatitudes were and ARE still counterintuitive and revolutionary. They are pretty much the opposite of our present culture. I’m not sure any of us, for example, would seek to be poor and totally reliant upon God and others for our daily bread! That’s the conundrum!

We seek the kingdom of God while living in the Kingdom of man...and Jesus is telling us they’re both right here and you get to choose which reality to live in.

The Beatitudes are to apply to every area of our lives...from the poverty of one’s attitude towards money and possessions, to how we care for those who have been marginalized... and this extends to all creation – to include our planet as well.

The Beatitudes teach us how to “BE PEACE,” not just to BE AT peace!

And this Shalom can only manifest itself by being rooted both in the life of God AND in the life of the physical world.

You think we could use some peace in our world today? What do you feel is the current base note in our world...fear or love?!

And more personally...has anyone here ever been broken, hurt, or in pain...anyone here in need of some peace...some grace!?

If I had to guess... that’s probably all of us! Would anyone here like a blessing today? This word “Blessed are”...affirms that this state of blessing already exists here.

Each beatitude declares that a group of people usually regarded as afflicted by the world... is in actuality blessed. And that those who are blessed have nothing at all to do to earn or attain this blessing. Jesus simply declares that they ARE already blessed.

The beatitudes are a declaration that God's grace and love is already here present...Heaven is here...You are blessed and you are beloved...and living this way allows you then to "be peace" and to "be love" in the world!

You are blessed... and so you now bless others!

As we live in God's kingdom, we come to live life more like those blessed (not too popular in the kingdom of man)...but this is our life long journey as Christians...to become a new creation in Christ!

Citizenship begins today in each one of you!

And our journey is not only about who we are now... BUT who we are yet to become...it's the process of living into our inheritance as a child of God.

For from our beginning, we have been given blessing upon blessing... and with that gifts comes the awesome responsibility to extend those blessings to others.

...and here's the thing... God's gifts... are only received in the giving!!

So Blessed and Beloved are you all ... especially when we turn outwardly and bless the world.

Your faithful servant,

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