

Sermon for Sunday – January 29, 2023
Matthew 5:1-12

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

This morning it is my challenge to reflect upon Jesus beautiful Sermon on the Mount – otherwise known as the Beatitudes.

It's a tricky little sermon isn't it? Not only is it a bit of a stretch for us prairie folk to imagine a sermon being preached from a Mountain but there is a trap hidden in these beautiful words - that I know I have fallen into countless times - and perhaps you have, too. *The trap is a simple - and that is - we have come to believe that Jesus is setting up the conditions of blessing, rather than actually blessing his hearers.*

Do you know what I mean? When I hear the Beatitudes, it's hard for me not to hear Jesus stating the terms under which I might be blessed. For instance, when I hear "Blessed are the pure in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," I tend to ask, "Am I pure enough in spirit?" or "I should try to be more pure in spirit." Or, when I hear "blessed are the peacemakers...", I think, "Yes, I really should be more committed to making peace."

Reading the Beatitudes again this week, I began to wonder whether our difficulty with the Beatitudes isn't symptomatic of a larger problem most of us have; namely, that **we are far less eager to be blessed - than God is to bless us.** Or maybe "eager" isn't quite the right word. Maybe it's more that we have a hard time believing God wants to bless us in the first place. It may be that our picture of God is distorted, ---that we can only imagine God as a stern, demanding law-giver, and so it seems out of character for God to bless without requirement. This isn't the primary picture of God in the Bible, but it may be the one that we were taught and have a hard time letting go of.

Or maybe it's not that we don't know God well enough to recognize God's grace, maybe it's that we know ourselves too well to feel worthy of that grace. After all, we are intimately familiar with our faults and limitations, our insecurities and failures. And knowing ourselves this well -- and knowing that God knows us even better -- we may find it hard to believe God loves us unconditionally. After all - very little - if anything in our world is unconditional. We're use to paying for our mistakes, paving our own way, toeing the line and reaping the consequences when we mess up, and so it may not only be unexpected, but downright unsettling and nearly

inconceivable to imagine that God behaves differently, **showering** us with blessing apart from anything we have done, earned, or deserve.

Let's be clear -- or at least pay attention to the fact that the gospel writer Matthew is quite clear -- Jesus isn't setting up conditions or terms so that we might be blessed but rather **Jesus is just plain blessing people.** All kinds of people. All kinds of down-and-out, extremely vulnerable, and at the bottom of the ladder people. Why? So that we might know that God regularly shows up in mercy - blessing just where you least expect God to be -- with the poor, those who are mourning, the meek and the peacemakers. This is not where citizens of the ancient world looked for God and, quite frankly, it's not where citizens of our own world look either. Friends, **if God shows up in such places, blessing the weak and the vulnerable, then God will be everywhere, showering all creation and its inhabitants with blessing.**

The sermon on the mount is all about Jesus' lavishly blessing the world around him especially that which society doesn't seem to have much time for: people in pain, people who work for peace instead of profit, people who exercise mercy instead of vengeance. Jesus is about blessing people, especially the people who never seem to receive blessings otherwise. **Now doesn't that sound just like something Jesus would do? Extravagantly throwing around blessings like they grow on trees?**

If Jesus is about blessing all people everywhere then we can imagine Jesus standing among us this morning. What would Jesus say to us:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised. Blessed are they who are spiritually impoverished and therefore not so certain about everything that they no longer take in new information. Blessed are those who have nothing to offer. Blessed are they for whom nothing seems to be working. Blessed are the pre-schoolers who cut in line at lunch. Blessed are the poor in spirit. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are they for whom death is not an idea but a near reality. Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears are as real as an ocean. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like. Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried. Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted any more. Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else. Blessed are the motherless, the alone, the ones from whom so much

has been taken. Blessed are those who “still aren’t over it yet”. Blessed are they who laughed again - when for so long they thought they never would.

“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who no one else notices: The kids who sit alone at recess - The cleaners at the hospital. Blessed are the losers and the babies and the parts of ourselves that are so small. The parts of ourselves that don’t want to make eye contact with a world that only loves the winners. Blessed are the forgotten. Blessed are the closeted. Blessed are the unemployed, and the unimpressive. Blessed are the teens who have to figure out ways to hide the new cuts on their arms. Blessed are the meek. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

What would Jesus say to us:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard – for they are those with whom Jesus chooses to surround himself. Blessed are foster kids and trophy kids and special ed kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved and never does. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are they who know there has to be more than this. Because they are right.

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people. Blessed are the burnt-out social workers and the over worked teachers. Blessed are the kids who step between the bullies and the weak. Blessed are they who delete hateful, racist comments off their friend’s Facebook page.

Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven someone when they didn’t deserve it. Blessed are the merciful for they totally get it.

Blessed am I – Blessed are you.

Imagine Jesus here, blessing us, because I believe that this is the nature of our Redeemer. To be about blessing wherever we are - whatever our situation. //

Jesus came to us in the most vulnerable of ways – as a powerless, flesh and blood newborn. As though to say – the world may admire strength and might, but I am blessing all human weakness. The world may seek power, but I am blessing all human vulnerability.

This Jesus, whom we follow, cried at the tomb of his friend, and turned the other cheek and forgave those who hung him on a cross. This

Jesus broke bread and drank wine with those who would be entrusted with the message of blessing. **Jesus was God's Beatitude!**

Friends Jesus is blessing you! Jesus is blessing all of us.
It is not possible to leave this sanctuary without hope.
It is not possible to leave this sanctuary without courage.
It is not possible to leave this place without knowing Gods love.

Amen