



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for June 14, 2020
“From the Mount: Blessed Are Those”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: Matthew 5:3-12

The Well-Built Life

Last week Ashlee talked about the well-built life. She referenced the great close to the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus offers his parable of the wise man who builds his house on the rock. *“And so it is for those who hear these words of mine and put them into practice,”* says Jesus.

Today we turn to the beginning of the Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:3-12 and read:

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.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:3-12)

These are the blessings of the well-built life.

The Challenge of Christ’s Words

Whenever I need a good dose of Jesus and what he taught I turn to the Matthew 5-7. We are going to be doing that this summer. As we mentioned last week we will be studying what Jesus taught in his Sermon on the Mount, hence the title, *From the Mount*. As have others down through the centuries, I’m confident you and I will find ourselves challenged to no end.

I want to encourage you to dive in. Read and re-read these important passages of scripture. You will need to do that because we will be moving through pretty quickly. Jesus’ teachings were nothing short of revolutionary. They challenged the established teachings of the day.

Christ’s interest was to help people know what was expected of them if they were considering citizenship in the Kingdom of God. The words of Jesus as taught from the mount are just as true and just as challenging as they have ever been.

The Beatitudes

Every sermon needs a good introduction. You certainly don’t want to lose people before you get started. Sometimes that introduction can range from a story, to a joke, or a particularly profound quote. Whatever, the intent is to grab everyone’s attention.

Jesus starts his Sermon on the Mount with something particularly profound. The Beatitudes have a way of drawing us in. They give us a lot to think about. The Beatitudes speak to the tie between experiencing God's blessing and the disposition of our hearts. The beatitudes are not the easiest to understand, yet they hit right where we live. Upon hearing them we are left to ponder their deeper meaning for our lives.

In the end, they leave us to consider a different way, the Kingdom way. The characteristics for those who align themselves with God's Kingdom are just different than those espoused by the world, yet when we live them out, we are blessed to no end.

Let's face it, we could easily do a whole sermon series on just the Beatitudes. This morning we will only consider a few of them. Hopefully, you will be inspired to read and study further. I'd love to talk with you about any of them. I encourage you to engage others in that very same conversation. Let me also encourage you to study them as a family.

Blessed

I have a good friend that when asked, *"How you doing?"* he responds, *"I'm blessed."* Indeed he is. He is a Christ follower and Jesus is making a big difference in his life.

As we read just a few minutes ago every one of the Beatitudes starts with the word, *"blessed."*

Years ago, Robert Schuler of Crystal Cathedral fame wrote a book on the Beatitudes. He called it, *The Be Happy Attitudes*. I always felt he was on to something. Life in Jesus changes our whole outlook on life. Our attitudes are swayed, our focus is different, and our hearts are well-centered. In a word, those who know Jesus know happiness. No wonder we are so blessed.

So let's dive in.

The Joy of Being Poor in Spirit

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

As much as we are into self-sufficiency, even to the point of figuring we can make it on our own, somewhere along the line there comes a reckoning. We can only make it so far on our own energy. We talk about that a lot. It's then that we come to the place of recognizing our own poverty. There is no room in the Kingdom of God for those who figure they can go it alone without God's help. There's no room for spiritual pride.

Oswald Chambers in his book, *My Utmost for His Highest* talks about *"giving up the right to ourselves."* In *"giving up the right to ourselves"* we recognize our own poverty and give all that we are, such as we are, to God. Doing so will lead us to a place of obedience that, in turn, will lead us to the very threshold of the kingdom of heaven.

Wesley's Covenant Prayer puts it this way, *"Lord, let me be your servant, under your command. I will no longer be my own. I will give up myself to your will in all things. Lord, make me what you will. I put myself fully into your hands: put me to doing, put me to suffering, let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and with a willing heart give it all to your pleasure and disposal."*

Such is the blessedness of the *"poor in spirit."*

The Joy of Being Broken Hearted

There is all too much pain in this world. If anything, our present circumstance bears that out. Grief seems to be the order of the day. We are either grieving the loss brought on by the pandemic or the racial injustices that have most recently been brought to light.

“Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.”

Christ stands ready to give us solace. He stands to turn our sorrow into joy. Hopefully all of us have known and experienced the consolation and support of God in our sorrow.

There is something much deeper here that cuts to the heart what it means to be a repentant sinner. We don't talk about it in polite conversation very much, but new life in Jesus begins with having a sense of the things we have done wrong, those things that have separated us from God. We call that conviction.

Blessed is the one who is intensely sorry for the wrong he or she has done. The person who is heart-broken over that wrong is at the very place of being comforted by the deep and abiding forgiveness of God made possible by the death of his Son on the cross and because of that forgiveness we are comforted and counted among the most blessed of all.

The Joy of Giving Ourselves to God

So where does that leave us? We are left to give it all up for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

Meekness is much maligned these days. It's not a trait people often aspire to. When we think of *“the meek”* we usually think of those who don't have much of a backbone. They're pretty wishy-washy.

Meekness, true meekness, is anything but that. For those who are members of God's Kingdom, meekness is a characteristic of being given over to God and in that they are strengthened to no end. Citizens of God's Kingdom give themselves over to their King and do so in all faith and without reserve. They recognize their own weakness and latch on to the one who is the very definition of strength, and because of that they gain much. Jesus says, *“They shall inherit the earth.”*

The Joy of Seeking God

Anybody hungry? If you are like me I oftentimes think about my next meal before I finish the one I'm working on. Food is that big of a deal.

The spiritual food God offers is even a bigger deal. To have a *“hunger and thirst”* for the things of God puts us at the very place he wants us to be. I have heard it said that we are created with a *“God-shaped void,”* and God stands ready to fill it every time. When we hunger and thirst after God, as a matter of first order, we become deeply fulfilled. God fills us, and doesn't just fill us, but fills us to the overflowing.

Imagine what it is like to be really hungry. We get hungry every now and then, but not *“really”* hungry. There are, though, people near and far who are really hungry. They will do just about anything for something to eat.

The same is true for those who thirst, particularly on a hot summer's day. They will do just about anything for something to drink.

I wonder if we have that same desire when it comes to *"the bread of life"* or *"the living water"* God so longs to offer us. Hear again what Jesus says about such things.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

At another spot he says, *"I am the bread of life, he who believes in me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."* (John 6:35)

So let's, *"taste and see that the Lord is good."* (Psalm 38:4) And by so doing, we *will* be filled.

The Joy of Being a Peacemaker

I will close with this, knowing that you have a few more Beatitudes to study.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

We could use a few peacemakers these days.

People who are:

- willing to listen
- willing to give their brother or sister the benefit of the doubt
- willing to walk in somebody else's shoes
- willing to live out the golden rule by *"doing unto others what you would want them to do unto you"*
- willing to see another as a person for who they are, a creation of God Almighty
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I had this Beatitude put up on our sign this week, thinking that I would let Christ's word have its way with our community as it drove by. I lament though that most went by at 55 miles an hour and barely noticed. We'd do well to slow down and consider what Christ wants us to do during this time of turmoil and tension.

I encourage you to consider what God wants **you** to do to promote peace right where you live.

May the refrain of our lives be that of the song, *"Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."*

Letting the Beatitudes Speak for Themselves

Just now

- Let's let the whole of what Christ says have sway.
- Let's open our lives to his blessings as we consider the condition of our hearts.
- Let's ask ourselves how we need to be living our lives differently.
- Let's let the Beatitudes guide us in that.
- Let's let Christ speak into **our** lives to the end that we are truly blessed to be a blessing.
- Let's take a moment to reflect on the Beatitudes and allow the Spirit do his thing as we hear them read.
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Hear this then from Eugene Peterson's, **The Message:**

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

You're blessed when you're content with just who you are—no more, no less. That's the moment you find yourself proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourselves cared for.

You're blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

You're blessed when you show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

Not only that—count ourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable.

You can be glad when that happens."