

Blessed Be...Pastor Donna Doutt – February 2, 2020 - Matthew 5:1-12

Last week we heard in our scripture readings that Jesus was on the move from his hometown of Nazareth, walking about 25 miles north to the fishing village on the Sea of Galilee called Capernaum. Five of Jesus' disciples live in the area, Peter and Andrew, James and John, and Matthew.

It was here; on a gently sloping hillside that Jesus preached what is probably the most famous sermon of all time called the Sermon on the Mount.

Now I don't want to confuse anyone with the background here, but I want you to be aware that in the parallel of this same scripture about the Sermon on the Mount, Luke takes his version of the sermon of the "mount" and calls it the Sermon on the Plain.

Whether it was on the mount or the plains is really insignificant. But what is important is that by today's standard, we might call this sermon "The Best of Jesus", because it was sort of like the "Ted Talk" of sermons.

Jesus presents us with the famous lesson that we heard in this morning's reading called the "Beatitudes." ¹Merriam-Webster defines "beatitude" as "a state of utmost bliss." Jesus intended this list of beatitudes to be the cure for spiritual happiness...a promise for success in the world. And even though he talks about discomfort and failure, he wants us to know that if we're persistent and continue ourselves humbly in service to God, blessings of the earth will be ours.

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/beatitude>

Living out the beatitudes is important for a Christian. The purpose of the beatitudes is to inspire you to act in certain ways, living out these rules is absolutely at the heart of the matter.

So, the best way to look at this is to go through the beatitudes one by one. Each of you, as we do this, ask yourself, "How can I live out each beatitude?"

Some of these acts are simple, and some of these ask so much more of us:

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

Humble. You could rephrase that by saying, "Blessed are the humble."

It doesn't mean you need to be physically or financially poor. We're talking about a humble person, a Christian servant who gives of themselves, volunteers where needed, and expects nothing in return. This is a person who prays every day, but always for others. This is the humble person who works hard to ensure that God is evident in their daily life. God wants you to have confidence and trust in Him alone. John Wesley believed strongly in humility because humility enables us to understand that we are flawed human creatures in need of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

James 4:6-10 says, *⁶ But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.*

"Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted." This is for all the grieving people, who have known the greatest sorrow and whose hearts have broken, but yet their hearts have remained open to God's comfort. Those who are true believers will know that no matter what tragedy befalls them, their loved one, friend or family, that sooner or later there will still be a future for them with the Lord. Revelation 21:4 says, ⁴ "he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away."

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

The meek are never puffed up with pride or bragging about what they do. The love of God doesn't need to be loud. You don't need to shout from the street corners. But you can show God's love by serving in small quiet ways, like delivering or serving meals, caring and visiting the sick and shut-ins. Psalm 37:11 reminds us, ¹¹ *"But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity."*

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."

Social justice is an important component of United Methodism. Did you know that Methodists were the forerunners of the Salvation Army? It's true! Whether it's signing petitions for important social legislation, or being a student that stands up against bullying, we DO need to thirst for righteousness. John Wesley strongly believed that justice is demonstrated when ministers and leaders speak out against evil, without regard to personal gain or loss. I feel this deteriorating world needs more people who hunger and thirst for righteousness. *Amos 5: 24 reads, ²⁴ "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."* The study notes for this scripture claims, "The simile is especially apt: As plant and animal life flourishes where there is water, so human life flourishes where there is justice and righteousness." Let us all be fearless for righteousness.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." The first recorded gift of mercy was with Adam and Eve. Yes, God had warned them, but never really explained the consequences about eating from the tree of knowledge. And yes, he did drive them out of the garden as punishment. However, it was also mercy on the part of God. He could have killed them, but he didn't. He showed them mercy.

"And the LORD God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever.' So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. (Gen. 3:23).

Mercy is found anytime someone truly forgives another. I encourage you take think for a minute, when in your life have you shown mercy such as that we God shows?

"Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."

Titus 1:15 reads like this, ¹⁵ *"To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure. Their very minds and consciences are corrupted."* I kind of think this Titus scripture is saying that the pure remain innocent and think only pure thoughts. Gullible I guess you would have to say. But those who are evil take advantage of those who think only pure thoughts and take advantage of them. Children exhibit the purest of heart. Until taught otherwise, they show no bias or prejudice. When you read the Bible with an open heart to receive the message that is pure love of the Word. You do something good expecting nothing in return, that is purity of heart. In this corrupted world in which we live, it is truly a struggle to remain pure of heart. Just as the physical heart is at the center of our bodies, so "heart" is a metaphor that describes our spiritual center. The heart is seen in our loves, fears, and joys. Our hearts are open to God's influence, but are also shaped by our own decisions.

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

Two friends from childhood who still carry grudges reconcile and reignite their relationship. Family members reconcile with one another. World leaders come together with open minds and an agenda for peace. Those are the peacemakers. Romans 12:18 says, *"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all ..."* OK. We know that's sometimes hard to do. But can you remember a time when you were a peacemaker? How did that make you feel? Did you feel blessed for succeeding in the healing between others?

"Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Have you been mocked for your religious belief? Have you ever felt persecuted? Is martyrdom not your cup of tea? Have you been brave enough to acknowledge that you're a Christian even if you know that will bring consequences? Verse 11 and 12 of our Matthew scripture completes this Beatitude by saying, *"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."*

The ²"Open Doors 2020 Watch List" says 260 million Christians around the world experience high levels of persecution. That's up 6% from 2019. 2,983 Christians were killed last year for faith-related reasons. That's 8 Christians killed every day for their faith. If you would like to see that list, I will include a link in this week's E-news. 1 Corinthians 12:26: *"If one part [of the Body of Christ] suffers, every part suffers with it."*

² <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/2020-world-watch-list-report/>

Clearly, there are a number of ways in which the beatitudes of blessing can come into play in daily life.

Marcia Riggs, a professor of Christian Ethics at Columbia Theological Seminary, sums up the Beatitudes like this:

³“...the theological heart of the Beatitudes is a call to be disciples who live out the virtues of the blessings in pursuit of righteousness grounded in God’s righteousness (that includes God’s steadfast love, goodness, justice, and mercy). God’s blessings are our command, because God first loved us, giving us the blessing of Jesus Christ, our Salvation” (312).

But let us never forget the lessons we’ve learned from those “rules” that God gave to Moses as the Ten Commandments, and through the “rules” of the Beatitudes that Jesus taught us at the Sermon on the Mount; there is still one more lesson and that is Jesus’ greatest commandment to the disciples, when they asked him, ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’[a] ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’[b] ⁴⁰All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” “Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV).

Let’s see what we can do this week to fulfill and honor our Christians obligations. My blessings to you as you continue your journey to live into and follow Jesus’ footsteps.

³ Riggs, Marcia Y. *Feasting on the Word – Year A, Volume 1*. Bartlett, David L., et al., editors. Louisville, Kentucky. 2010. Print.