

Imagine Such Blessings  
United Church of Broomfield  
November 5, 2023

**Matthew 5:1-12 KJV**

1 And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him:

2 And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying,

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.

10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

12 Rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

**Luke 6:20-26 KJV**

20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.

21 Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

22 Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

23 Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets.

24 But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation.

25 Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.

26 Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets.

\*\*\*\*

Sometimes we make up phrases to reflect conventional wisdom. The author Kate Bowler wrote about some of those phrases in her book, *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved*.

The phrases can feel reassuring. For example, “God never gives you more than you can handle.” But that one, however, raises the question of why our mental health institutions are so busy helping overwhelmed people. Then there is, “God needed another angel,” too often said to the grieving parents of a dead child. It’s meant to be reassuring but Bowler calls the god it depicts “sadistic.”<sup>1</sup>

This matter of making up sayings is not new. Many scholars indicate that the book of Job was written precisely to challenge the conventional wisdom that suffering was a sign that someone sinned. Please – never buy into such a crazy notion.

So, in the ministry of Jesus, we find that he, too, challenges conventional wisdom. And there’s no better example of that than the Beatitudes, which we read from the book of Matthew today.

The Beatitudes are countercultural; they defy the common sense and convention wisdom of the mainstream society. They take what people think are true sayings and they turn them on their head. The Beatitudes, in other words, make people stop and say, “Wait. What?” And that response is a clue that maybe we haven’t fully appreciated the way Jesus challenges the systems that rule our culture and our world.

Jesus asks us to stop and reimagine how the world would be different if we actually tried to live out the values of love, compassion, mercy, peace and justice instead of the ideas our culture often values and promotes -such as power, wealth, consumerism, mindless entertainment, and war.

In proclaiming the Beatitudes, Jesus, the rebel-rouser, bad-ass that he was, was out to shake up our world in fundamental ways and to change us.

Over the years some people have tried to tame or domesticate the Beatitudes. The famous TV preacher Robert Schuller, for instance, once wrote a book called *The Be (Happy) Attitudes*. Jesus’ Beatitudes, however, weren’t designed as a recipe for happiness but, rather, as a way of understanding what the reign of God is all about. That reign, of course, doesn’t exclude happiness, but being reviled and persecuted and called evil things on account of our love of Jesus seems like an odd way to achieve happiness. And it’s meant to sound odd. To break the cycles of violence, fear, and oppression, we have to embrace, advocate and live the odd and countercultural way of Jesus.

You’ve probably heard the Beatitudes dozens of times in your life and I’m sure you’ve questioned their paradoxical nature: the hungry and poor are blessed? Rejoice when you’re persecuted? Really? Let’s listen to the Beatitudes anew, through different translations, and perhaps **HEAR** them for the very first time.

I’m going to read each verse of the Beatitudes from a different Biblical translation...

- From the *Common English Bible* it says, **Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.**

A footnote in that translation says that its use of the word “hopeless,” instead of the traditional phrase “poor in spirit” does not “refer to ‘humility’ but to those who continue to look to God for help in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved* (Random House; 2018), XVI.

midst of their present, needy state.”<sup>2</sup> Remember that when Jesus began his ministry, among the very first words he said were that the **kingdom of heaven** is at hand, or has come near. He was telling people that God’s reign is not limited to the afterlife in sweet heaven but, rather, it can be experienced this very day (it is at hand) if we live by God’s values; love compassion, mercy, peace and justice. So, it would seem that Jesus is saying that people who have come to the end of their human resources for fixing the problems they face can be glad that they haven’t really run completely out of resources because God is the God of possibilities and God can find a way even when we can’t.

- From the 1560 edition of the *Geneva Bible*: **Blessed are they that mourne, for they shall be comforted.**

Notice that no timeline is indicated or promised here. That’s because all of us who have ever mourned the death of someone we love, know that grief really never ends. Rather, it transforms -- we eventually accommodate ourselves to the reality of the loss. And one way we do that is through the **comfort** given to us by others, sometimes merely by their presence. Beyond that, of course, we hold to the hope that one day we may be reunited with lost loved ones who are in God’s presence.

- From *The Holy Bible Translated by Ronald Knox* in 1954: **Blessed are the patient; they shall inherit the land.**

I appreciate the use here of patient, instead of meek, because so often I think people confuse meek with weak and that’s incorrect. Patient is a synonym for meek. I think one of the ways we can understand this Beatitude is as people who seem powerless by earthly standards because they’re not asserting themselves and “taking what’s rightfully theirs!” The “pie-analogy” comes to mind; there’s a finite amount and you’d better get yours now (and maybe take more than yours, even). Many people know that earthly power is fleeting, unreliable, sometimes destructive. Eventually it runs out and eventually you realize it was really for nothing. Recognizing that, they can accept the world, all of creation, as God’s beautiful gift to everyone, and that is the riches that are enough and abundant. It’s helpful here to think of “the land” in the way Native Americans often do -as something we don’t own but, rather, something to which we belong and from which we can learn.

- From the *English Standard Version*: **Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.**

Righteousness can refer to individual piety and devoutness: the world could use more of that. But Jesus seems more interested in critiquing and fixing systems that crush others rather than in whether someone prays three times a day or never says anything stronger than the word “darn.” Righteousness calls for justice for all. That’s what everyone should be passionately striving for – hungering, thirsting because your life depends on it. Remember that Jesus called out the hypocrites who pretended to be pious. He had little patience with people who prayed loudly in public but supported an economy that favored the wealthy. First Corinthians 12:26 says, “If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all parts are glad.”

- From the *Holy Bible from the Ancient Eastern Text*, translated from the Aramaic: **Blessed are the merciful, for they shall have mercy.**

---

<sup>2</sup> *The Common English Bible Study Bible*, Joel B. Green, general editor (The Common English Bible, 2013), note 5:3 on page 12 NT.

Reputations get around. If you forgive someone for something, don't be surprised if that forgiven person lets others know of your kindness. "Paying it forward" isn't a new concept, but it became reinvigorated after the 1999 movie of the same title. In Starbucks drive-thru's, people began to pay for the car behind them to "pay it forward" by doing something nice. Well, try mercy. Earn a reputation of paying forward grace and mercy. Just as vengeance given, results in vengeance received, in the end, mercy comes back to the merciful, and conflict in the world is thereby reduced. We replace cycles of violence with cycles of mercy.

- From the *Revised English Bible*: **Blessed are those whose hearts are pure; they shall see God.**

Heart here, of course, is a metaphor for our center, our essence, our soul. Remember that a *pure heart*, isn't a perfect and sin-free heart. Having a pure heart though surely means that one has been forgiven, redeemed, rescued from evil. And when we remove evil, what's left to see? God, of course. Now, there are people who seem unable to see God anywhere and people who see God everywhere. Stop looking for perfect and look instead for love and compassion, because a thriving, heavenly world full of pure hearts does see God everywhere.

- From the *New International Version*: **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.**

Peacemakers -regardless of gender -can be thought of as direct descendants of God because God is the ultimate peacemaker, reconciling humanity to God through Christ. Not everyone has the gift of being a peacemaker, but we can all speak to peace and live accordingly. Doing so, one understands that peace is not simply the absence of war but, rather, an atmosphere in which humanity can flourish. It's the task to which Christ, who is our peace, calls all of us. What can we say or do to help all of God's creation not just survive and exist, but thrive?

- From the *New American Bible*: **Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

It's not something any of us tries to achieve, persecution. "Oh, let me good a good Christian and get my feelings, body or livelihood hurt in the process!" But that's often the result when you think about it. And who gets persecuted or harassed for trying to be righteous? The goody-two-shoes people or the "Pollyannas." That's the dismissive terms they get called, anyway, simply for being positive and optimistic. We don't want to be persecuted, BUT we also don't want to be ridiculed and mocked for living our faith. It's a sticky wicket, as some say...but is it really?

Those persecuted for the sake of righteousness are the people trying to discern and do God's will. Call them whatever you like. Accept the challenges of what it means to be a Christian. "Sticks and stones..." Jesus says that if you live by God's will, you can live in the kingdom of heaven TODAY. I'm willing to give it a try. How about you?

- From the *Contemporary English Version*: **God will bless you when people insult you, mistreat you and tell all kinds of evil lies about you because of me. Be happy and excited! You will have a great reward in heaven.**

Being reviled and persecuted doesn't sound like the kind of job description for which most of us would sign up. It's hard to come to terms with this request, but I'll remind all of us that Christianity is not an easy faith. It calls for sacrifice, for following someone who loved us enough to be executed for us. Jesus here is simply telling us what the author of Psalm 30 told us: Mourning may last through the night, but joy comes in the morning.

Imagine a world in which people really tried to live by the Beatitudes. We can do more than imagine it. We can help bring such a peaceful, loving world into existence by following the One who told us how we can be blessed. We can begin today. May it be so.

AMEN