



Jan. 29, 2023 Mt. 5: 1-12. Micah 6:1-8

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ENTERING THE SCENE:

Kurt Vonnegut once said: "For some reason, the most vocal Christians among us never mention the beatitudes. But, often with tears in their eyes, they demand that the Ten Commandments be posted in public buildings. And of course that's Moses, not Jesus. I haven't heard one of them demand that the Sermon on the Mount, the beatitudes, be posted anywhere."

Could that be because they fear opening themselves to the kind of loving that the beatitudes require? The 10 commandments basically give them a way to meet God's basic requirements without that vulnerability. If we are ever to get to Jesus' understanding of God the beatitudes will be our guide.

Mt. 5: 1-12

1 Now when he saw the **crowds**, he went up on a **mountainside** and **sat down**. His disciples came to him,

2 and he began to teach them, saying: 3 **Blessed** are the **poor in spirit**, for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**. 4 **Blessed** are those who **mourn**, for they will be **comforted**. 5 **Blessed** are the **meek**, for they will **inherit the earth**. 6 **Blessed** are those who **hunger and thirst for righteousness**, for they will be **filled**. 7 **Blessed** are the **merciful**, for they will be shown **mercy**. 8 **Blessed** are the **pure in heart**, for they **will see God**. 9 **Blessed** are the **peacemakers**, for they will be called **sons of God**. 10 **Blessed** are those who are **persecuted because of righteousness**, for theirs is the **kingdom of heaven**. 11 **Blessed** are you when people **insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me**. 12 **Rejoice** and be **glad**, because great is your reward in **heaven**, for in the same way they **persecuted the prophets** who were before you.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: The beatitudes are a Christian's "job description". How close is my life to qualifying for the position of Christian?

PRAYER: Lord, when I truly accept your love, I will be able to care enough to mourn, have a quiet strength, and be able to accept your love so as to love as well. Then my single hearted devotion to you can enable me to be in right relationship with you, others and myself. Give me the strength I need to hold on to this truth. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:



CROWDS: Jesus leaves the crowds and takes the disciple's aside to begin to teach them.

Are you a disciple or a member of the crowd?

MOUNTAINSIDE: In scripture, the mountains were thought to be where one could get close to God.

Where do you go to get closer to God? Do you have a 'holy place'?

SAT DOWN: Teachers always sat when teaching in Jesus' day. This distinguished between the reading of the Scriptures, and the teaching of the one 'breaking open the word'.

Can you remember a time when someone changed posture in order to make time to help you understand something? What happened in those brief moments inside you? What do you think

the disciples' felt when Jesus stopped and sat down with them?

BLESSED: Nine times we hear 'blessed'. Other ways of saying this can be: "Oh, how happy are those, or, how honored are those". The disciples were now to be 'let in on' the secret of happiness and honor.
Do you think they were surprised when they heard these paradoxical sayings?

POOR IN SPIRIT: Matthew's community was not poor materially, and they believed that God rewarded them because of their goodness. But they were poor spiritually. They longed for a God worthy of their worship.
How does such a longing make a person 'poor in spirit'?

KINGDOM OF HEAVEN: Jesus teaches that once a person accepts God's unconditional love, they were already in "the kingdom of heaven".
As a member of the family of God, do you make time to meditate on the fact that God unconditionally loves you? Does this help you to understand the now-ness of the kingdom of heaven?

MOURN: To mourn is to grieve the loss of someone or something precious.
Is there anything causing you grief in your family of faith?



COMFORTED: To be comforted is to have someone console you or take care of your needs.
Is there anything that promises to console you in that mourning? Is there anyone addressing the things that are causing you grief? Where do you find comfort?

MEEK: Meekness is a form of gentle strength.
Do you know any meek people? Are you one?

INHERIT THE EARTH: To inherit something is to have it come to you because you are an heir.
Are you confident in your inheritance as a child of God? Is there anything or anyone that you give the power to 'disinherit' you?

HUNGER / THIRST: Two of the most basic human needs are food and drink. They are needed to stay alive and grow.
How are you meeting your needs for food and drink in your faith life? Does studying the Word help to nourish you and help you grow?

(Fra Angelico (1387-1455) scene on wall of a monk's cell in the mendicant Dominican monastery of San Marco in Florence) [BAR](#) 1/2004 Pg. 32.

RIGHTEOUSNESS: Righteousness is the state of being in right relationship with everything and everyone.
Is there any 'unrighteousness' in your life right now? What is it?

FILLED: To be full is to have no emptiness. God's family includes everyone God creates.
How do you feel when someone tries to disown or excommunicate one of God's 'family'? Do you have a sense of emptiness when this happens?

MERCIFUL / MERCY: Mercy comes from the one who has a gentle strength in response to a real need.
Are you a merciful person? Is your understanding of God one who is full of mercy? If not, why not?

PURE IN HEART: To be pure in heart is to be single-minded and clear about what is important. In today's world, with so many competing calls for our time and attention, it is hard to be 'pure in heart'.
How do you guard against losing your 'purity of heart'?

WILL SEE GOD: Once a person understands Jesus' teachings, they will see God as he sees God.
How does scripture study help you see God as Jesus sees God?

PEACEMAKERS: Peace is Shalom or total well-being. Peacemakers work and pray for everyone's well being.
In what ways are you a 'peacemaker'? Do you have anyone in your life that you call a peacemaker? Why?

SONS OF GOD: It is said that we become like the God we worship. We ‘inherit’ the traits of our Creator.
What characteristics of your Father have you inherited? Can others see God’s resemblance in you?

PERSECUTED / INSULT/ FALSELY SAY ALL KINDS OF EVIL: Jesus prepares his disciples for the inevitable response of those who refuse to see what they see.
Have you ever been wounded because of your beliefs? How did you handle this hurtful event?

BECAUSE OF ME: The disciples need to know what they are about. They are to be single-minded about understanding Jesus’ teachings. No other motive will do.
How does studying the Word help you know what you are about so that you can stay single-minded?

REJOICE /GLAD: Those attracted to Jesus will find a joy that the world cannot give.
How can this scripture help make you rejoice and be glad?

PROPHETS: All those who see beyond to what is coming, and proclaim the way for others to go, can be said to be prophets.
Who is a prophet for you? Are you a prophet?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Mt. 5:1f // Lk. 6:20-23; Mt. 19:21,29; 2 Cor. 8:9; **Mt. 5: 4** // Ps. 126:5; Is. 61:2f; Rev. 21:4; **Mt. 5:5** // Gen. 13:15; Ps. 37:11; Prov. 2:21; **Mt. 5:6** // Prov. 21:21; **Mt. 5: 8** // Ps. 24:4f; Ps. 73:1; Prov. 22:11; **Mt. 5:10** // 1 Pt. 2:20; 3:14; 4:14; **Mt. 5: 11** // Acts 5: 41; **Mt. 5:12** // Phil. 1:29; Col. 1:24; James 1:2;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Zeph. 2:3; 3:12-13; Ps. 146: 6-10; 1 Cor. 1:26-31; Mt. 5:1-12;
Revised Common Lectionary: Micah 6:1-8; Ps. 15; 1 Cor. 1:18-31; Mt. 5:1-12;

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

When we have been deeply hurt by another person, it is nearly impossible not to have hostile thoughts, feelings of anger or hatred, and even a desire to take revenge. All of this often happens spontaneously, without much inner control. We simply find ourselves brooding about what we are going to say or do to pay back the person who has hurt us. To choose blessings instead of curses in such a situation asks for an enormous leap of faith. It calls for a willingness to go beyond all our urges to get even and to choose a life-giving response. Sometimes this seems impossible. Still, whenever we move beyond our wounded selves and claim our God-given selves, we give life not just to ourselves but also to the ones who have offended us. Henri Nouwen

How many times do we miss God's blessings because they are not packaged as we expected? – Anonymous

The Beatitudes offer us a self-portrait of Jesus. At first it might seem to be a most unappealing portrait - who wants to be poor, mourning and persecuted? Who can be truly gentle, merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, and always concerned about justice? Where is the realism here? Don't we have to survive in this world and use the ways of the world to do so? Jesus shows us the way to be in the world without being of it. When we model our lives on his, a new world will open up for us. The Kingdom of Heaven will be ours, and the earth will be our inheritance. We will be comforted and have our fill; mercy will be shown to us. Yes, we will be recognized as God's children and truly see God, not just in an afterlife, but here and now (see Matthew 5:3-10). That is the reward of modeling our lives on the life of Jesus! Henri Nouwen

This is the way of Jesus and the way to which he calls his disciples. It is the way that at first frightens or at least embarrasses us. Who wants to be humble? Who wants to be the last? Who wants to be like a little, powerless child? Who desires to lose his or her life, to be poor, mourning, and hungry? All this appears to be against our natural inclinations. But once we see that Jesus reveals to us, in his radically downward pull, the compassionate nature of God, we begin to understand that to follow him is to participate in the ongoing self-revelation of God. By setting out with Jesus on the road of the cross, we become people in whose lives the compassionate presence of God in this world can manifest itself. As Barth observes, what seemed to be unnatural from the perspective of the world becomes natural for the follower of Christ. Just as in Christ's servanthood God's nature becomes evident, so for those who want to proclaim God's presence in the world, servanthood becomes a natural response. Pg. 29. Nouwen, Henri, et al. [Compassion](#). NY. Image Books. 1983.

The fourth poverty in the Bible is the deep realization of my own limitedness and weakness. This is the central motif of the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who weep" Mt. 5: 3ff Many things in life cannot be

changed, you can only grieve over them. So long as we are no longer under the compulsion of wanting to change them, we have the freedom to change them. Then the change comes from much greater depth, not from our anger, but from a place of integrity, not from a place where fear dwells, but from deep trust, not from a place where self-righteousness rules, but from wisdom. Pg. 74. Rohr, Richard. [Simplicity: the Art of Living](#). NY. Crossroad. 1992.

Mt. 5:3; Gosp. of Thomas Logion 54; Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor, for yours in the kingdom of heaven."

Mt. 5: 5--Clement of Alexandria - Protrepticus X.94.4: So the scripture naturally preaches to those who have believed, "And the saints of the Lord shall inherit the glory of God and his power."

In the early church, there was a manual called the [Didascalia](#), whose primary concern was the qualifications, duties, and conduct of persons holding office, especially the bishops, presbyters, deacons, widows and readers. In chapter 3 of this document, we find the beatitudes as a form of job description.

Ehrman, Bart. [After the New Testament](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 1998. Pages 333-4.

The peacemaker is one in whom the peace of Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, is actively present. To become a peacemaker is to have peace within, to be a source of peace. Restoring unity to our fragmented souls, the Spirit centers us on Christ. Peace in the world can certainly come from no other source, for a person centered on himself cannot do the will of God nor live at one with others.

Caldecott, Stratford. [Zeal in Detachment: The Paradox of Peace in Christianity](#). [Parabola](#). Fall 1996. Pages 48ff.

Ps. 146

1 Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. 2 I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. 3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. 5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, 6 the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them-- the LORD, who remains faithful forever. 7 He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free, 8 the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous. 9 The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked. 10 The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.

"Truth is not flat like a sheet of paper. It has a body, a third dimension. It has gradations, is hierarchical. What is true at one level is not necessarily true at another. The higher a level lies, the more a knowledge of it presupposes the moral preparation of the soul. This structure of truth makes blockheads think that truth is subjective." Hans Urs von Balthasar

"I believe that the reason of life for each of us is simply to grow in love." Leo Tolstoy

"a holy community has its center outside itself, in a transcendence whose social analogue is the stranger. Thus a holy community defines the human in terms of an otherness that gives birth to an ethic of hospitality....Compassion binds the individual within the holy community to the individuals in the society beyond its borders." Darrell Fasching

The Sermon on the Mount invites victims to turn their suffering into a foretaste of the resurrection for themselves and a testimony to the triumph of Christ for the world. This, of course, takes more resolve than most of us have. No less a figure than Mother Theresa of Calcutta, when a hostile interviewer pointed out that, though she aided the suffering of the world, she ---Mother Theresa ----didn't suffer, she replied softly: "Because I am not worthy." (**Mt. 5: 1-12**) Gil Bailie

At present, many of the cells of this Christ Body are unaware of their divine calling, unaware of how special they are in the eyes of God, and unconscious of the fact that they are already living their lives as part of this Cosmic Body. For Teilhard, this Cosmic Body is meant to become fully conscious of itself in every cell of its being in such a way that every cell is also conscious of the whole Body's magnificent destiny. When this Christ Body realizes itself as the divine reality it has always been meant to be, that moment will be what Teilhard calls the Omega Point. (See Rev 1 :8)

From a review of Teilhard de Chardin: *The Divine Milieu Explained*. Teilhard Perspective Vol 41, Nu.2

There are many things which a person can do alone, but being a Christian is not one of them. As the Christian life is, above all things, a state of union with Christ, and of union of his followers with one another, love of the brethren is inseparable from love of God. Resentment toward any human being cannot exist in the same heart with love to God. The personal relationship to Christ can only be realized when one has "come to himself" as a member of His Body, the Christian fellowship.....William T. Ham

If we are to follow Christ, it must be in our common way of spending every day. If we are to live unto God at any time or in any place, we are to live unto him in all times and in all places. If we are to use anything as the gift of God, we are to use everything as his gift. - William Law

Gregory (the Great) was puzzled by the wording of the eighth beatitude, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.):10). How could persecution be a good? Happiness, according to Aristotle, requires "the gifts of fortune." Gregory answers that this is why the beatitude reads not simply, "Happy are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice," but adds the phrase "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." If one is to be happy, one must possess the good. There must be an end beyond being persecuted (which itself is not a good). Hence Gregory asks, "What is it that we will obtain? What is the prize? What is the crown? It seems to me that for which we hope is nothing other than the Lord himself. For He himself is the judge of those who contend, and the crown of those who win. He is the one who distributes the inheritance, he himself is the good inheritance. He is the good portion and the giver of the portion, he is the one who makes rich and is himself the riches. He shows you the treasure and is himself your treasure. . . . According to his promise those who have been persecuted for his sake shall be happy, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Happiness is possessing Christ. The beatitudes are not simply moral maxims, but invitations by Christ to his disciples "to ascend with him" that they might enjoy "fellowship with the God of all creation." Pg. 278.
Wilken, Robert L. [The Spirit of Early Christian Thought](#). London, Yale Univ. Press. 2003.

How can we embrace poverty as a way to God when everyone around us wants to become rich? Poverty has many forms. We have to ask ourselves, "What is my poverty?" Is it a lack of money, lack of emotional stability, lack of a loving partner, lack of security, lack of safety, lack of self-confidence? Each human being has a place of poverty. That's the place where God wants to dwell! "How blessed are the poor, " Jesus says (Mt. 5:3). This means that our blessing is hidden in our poverty. We are so inclined to cover up our poverty and ignore it that we often miss the opportunity to discover God, who dwells in t. Let's dare to see our poverty as the land in which our treasure is hidden.
Nouwen, Henri. [Bread For the Journey](#). NY. HarperSanFrancisco. 1977. Meditation for August 18th.

The Beatitudes are not simply moral maxims, but invitations by Christ to his disciples "to ascend with him" that they might enjoy "fellowship with the God of all creation." [Gregory of Nyssa Homily 8](#).

Blessed are those who have a pure heart and do not slander with their tongue. Blessed are those who hold to your precepts and do not follow the ways of iniquity. Blessed are those who swear by your Torah and do not burst out in ways of folly. Blessed are those who see it with pure hands and do not seek it with a treacherous heart. Blessed is the person who has attained wisdom and walks in the Law of the Most High.'([Dead Sea Scroll 4Q525](#))

"God is more eager to bestow blessings on us than we are to receive them." - St. Augustine

The beatitudes promote a vision of Christian character that was perfectly embodied and exemplified by Jesus. P-62
Harrington, Daniel-Keenan, James [Jesus and Virtue Ethics](#). NY. Sheed & Ward Book. 2002.

Jesus goes "up a mountain" (5:1), a phrase that invokes both the liberation from Egyptian tyranny in the giving of the torah to Moses and anticipates the establishment of God's reign at Zion.

Carter, Warren. [Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations](#) Harrisburg, PA. Trinity Press International. 2001. Pg. 107.

Blessed are you if you contemplate the Lord until you are radiant; the Lord will make his face shine in yours for the glory of all. Pg. 251. Olivera, Bernardo, O.C.S.O. [The Search for God: Conference, letters, and homilies](#). Kalamazoo, MI. Cistercian Pub. 2002.

"God is more eager to bestow blessings on us than we are to receive them." - St. Augustine

How many gifts and graces You have given me! How many favors You have fed me from your hand! I look for your love in all directions, then suddenly its blessing burns in me. - Rabia Al-Adawiyya

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Mother Gail Fitzpatrick, OCSO, in her book [Seasons of Grace](#), has a meditation in chapter 36 called Mournful Joy than you will find enriching. Fitzpatrick, Mother Gail, OCSO. [Seasons of Grace: Wisdom from the Cloister](#). Chicago. ACTA Pub. 2000. Pages 154ff

Wiederkehr, Macrina, OSB. [Seasons of Your Heart](#), Silver Burdett Co, Morristown, NJ. 1979. **BEATITUDES**: Page 77.
Clough, Joy. [The Characters Within](#). ACTA Pub. Chicago, IL. 1997. **FAITH**: Page 48-9.

