

January 29, 2017    Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

***The Beatitudes 1***

***Matthew 5: 1-5 (Luke 6:20-26) (Micah 6:8)***

In professional sports there is the telling saying ***“Winning is not everything, it’s the only thing.”***

In Real Estate we know what ***“Location. Location. Location.”*** really means.

In modern communications we hear ***“Context is everything.”***

Context whether in sports, sales or communications shapes and drives our understanding. Context shapes and drives everything in our gospel lesson this morning. Let’s have a look.

The original version of **Jesus’** teaching that we call the Beatitudes is found in Luke’s gospel. There were just **4** and they were addressed to the dispossessed peasant population of the Galilean countryside. These were the poor, out of work people who actually turned out to hear **Jesus** speak.

The ***poor*** actually meant the destitute. These were the folk turned off the land, now with no fixed address and living by sporadic daily employment.

The ***hungry*** were those who couldn’t count on a daily meal because they had no land to produce the food they needed and no craft to sell, and possibly no labour to offer. They were often reduced to begging on the streets to feed themselves and their families.

***Those who weep*** were actually crying because of the real pain and agony of their loss, hunger and destitution.

In Matthew’s hands, the **4** Beatitudes become **9**, because Matthew’s context is much different than the original teaching moment. Matthew’s audience is urban city dwellers, two generations, and hundreds of kilometres removed from Galilee. Over the past decade and a half they have been deported from Jerusalem to city centres in greater Syria. They are generally educated retainer or professional class;

middle class by today's standards. What's more they have just come through a schism in their synagogue tradition. As followers of the Way of **Jesus**, they have been ejected from the synagogue communities. Now they are asking how they can be followers of **Jesus** and still keep the Jewish tradition.

So Matthew, dealing with a spiritual crisis, spiritualizes the Beatitudes of **Jesus** for his different yet difficult situation.

*Blessed are you poor* becomes *blessed are you poor in spirit*; those whose faith has been shaken by all the in-fighting. *You are still on the right path to God.*

*Blessed are those who mourn* becomes *blessed are those who mourn the loss of their traditional faith community. They shall find comfort by continuing in the Way of Jesus.*

In the aftermath of turmoil, a new Beatitude is added, *Blessed are the meek* meaning, those who just suck it up, who don't continue stirring the pot to keep the troubles going. *They shall inherit the earth; they shall inherit God's New Day.*

Our 21<sup>st</sup> Century North American context is different yet difficult again. We live in a time of greater complexity, individuality, religious plurality and an expanded inner psychological life.

The first beatitude could be paraphrases something like this

*"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope.*

*Now you can trust more in God and God's goodness."*

The second could go something like this

*"You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you.*

*That's when you can be embraced by the Holy One who seeks to be most dear to you."*

The third beatitude could go something like this

*“You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are – no need for drama or heroics. That’s when you find yourselves possessing everything that can’t be bought.*

From an emergent spirituality perspective, a perspective that believes the Wisdom of **God** is spread across all faith traditions, I would sum up these three in just this one,

*“You are blessed when it is no longer all about you but more and more about the Mystery in the midst of life. You participate in the world as God intends.”*

Hymn #896 vs. 1, 2 with refrain, *Blest Are They*

***The Beatitudes 2 Matthew 5: 6-9 (Micah 6:8)***

Let's look again at how things change in the different contexts.

In **Jesus'** context ***blessed are those who are really hungry*** for a meal, changes in Matthew's hands and becomes.

***Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled with God's presence.***

Amidst the turmoil, Matthew adds another Beatitude.

***Blessed are the merciful  
for they will receive mercy as they have given it.***

Matthew also adds

***Blessed are the pure in heart, those who forgive and forget,  
for they shall see what God is up to.***

And again, living the turmoil of expulsion from the Synagogue community

Matthew adds

***Blessed are the peacemakers, they are for sure, the real children of God.***

Now, let's hear these Beatitudes in our Post-modern context of greater complexity, individuality, religious pluralism, and an expanded inner psychological life. The first beatitude of this group could be paraphrased something like this.

***You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for the harmony in  
the midst of life.***

***God's food and drink is a balanced meal that nourishes us for everlasting.***

The second beatitude could go something like this.

***You're blessed when you act with care. And being 'care-full',  
you find yourselves cared for.***

The third beatitude could go something like this.

***You're blessed when you get your inside world – your heart and mind –***

*connected. Then you can see God in all the world.*

The fourth beatitude could go something like this.

*You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete. That's when you discover who and who's you really are.*

From an emergent spirituality perspective, a perspective that believes the Wisdom of **God** is spread across all faith traditions, I would sum up these four in this one

**“You are blessed when you see and accept the Unity,**

**God in all things and all things in God.**

**You find a deep connecting peace in your soul.”**

Hymn #896 vs 2,3 refrain.

***The Beatitudes 3 Matthew 5: 10-12 (Micah 6:8)***

In Luke, **Jesus** gives the 4<sup>th</sup> and final beatitude.

***Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you,  
revile you and defame you on account of the Son of Man.***

However, Matthew breaks this last Beatitude into two sayings. In the midst of their community infighting, Matthew changes *hate you* into

***Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
theirs is the Kingdom of God,*** for you know you are on the right track.

Matthew puts a final exclamation point on the last portion.

***Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you  
and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account,  
you will get your reward.***

Let's again hear them in our context of greater complexity, individuality, religious pluralism and an expanded inner psychological life. These two beatitude could be paraphrased something like this.

***You're blessed when your commitment to 'God in all things' provokes  
persecution, and this persecution drives you even deeper into the Divine  
Unity.***

***Not only that – count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or  
throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit this reality. What it  
means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are  
uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens – celebrate, even!--  
for though they don't like it, the cosmos applauds. And know that you are  
in good company. Prophets and witness have always gotten into this kind  
of trouble.***

From an emergent spirituality perspective, a perspective that believes the Wisdom of **God** is spread across all faith traditions, I would sum up these last two in this one Beatitude:

***“You are blessed when you are finally willing to just be the change you want to see in the world. As you do this you will no longer sweat the small stuff. And it is all small stuff!”***

Notice who said the first part? (Gandhi) Recognize the book title in the second half?

**Jesus** stated **4**, Matthew expanded them to **9**, while our Post-modern context paraphrases quite extravagantly. However from an emergent spirituality perspective, a perspective that believes the Wisdom of **God** is spread across all faith traditions, I have reduced our Post-modern context, Matthew’s context and Luke’s context down to 3 Beatitudes for the 21<sup>st</sup>. Century.

So the 3 Beatitudes are:

- 1. You are blessed when it is no longer all about you, and more and more about the Mystery in the midst of life. You participate in the world as God intends.**
- 2. You are blessed when you see and accept the Unity, God in all things and all things in God. You find a deep connecting peace in your soul.**
- 3. You are blessed when you are finally willing to just be the change you want to see in the world. As you do this you will no longer sweat the small stuff. And it is all small stuff.**

Kind of like Micah’s answer to the question ***“What does our God require of us”*** but in reverse order:

**Walk humbly with your God,  
love kindness,  
and seek justice.**

### *Meditative Prayer*

Let's settle... and go deeper into God.

Breathe deeply ... and let it go.

Follow your breathing inward to that prayerful place.

Sense the light and love of Divine presence  
filling you and intensifying your being.

Now hear Jesus' teaching

**You are blessed when it is no longer all about you,  
and more and more about the Mystery in the midst of life.**

**You participate in the world as God intends....**

*As one who allows Christ to live through you,  
you are ready to just live it.*

Now take another deep breath as you hear Jesus' teaching

**You are blessed when you see and accept the Unity,  
God in all things and all things in God.**

**You find a deep connecting peace in your soul....**

*As one who allows Christ to live through you,  
you are ready to just live it.*

Now take another deep breath as you hear Jesus' teaching

**You are blessed when you are finally willing  
to just be the change you want to see in the world.**

**As you do this you will no longer sweat the small stuff.**

**And it is all small stuff.**

*As one who allows Christ to live through you,  
you are ready to just live it.*

Now come back to this sacred space as we pray together as Jesus taught us saying;