

Beatitudes Matthew 5:1-12

June 8, 2020

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In the Sermon of the Mount, Matthew presents Jesus as a second Moses. The teachings are given on a mountain, places of encounters with God. The Ten Commandments were given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Jesus preached the Beatitudes on the Mount of Beatitudes. The commandments were edicts and rules of the Jewish law to be kept. The Beatitudes point to compassionate peaceful living, with Jesus as the central example as a means to happiness. Joan Chittister calls them *BE-ATTITUDES* or characteristics of the blessed life, the “Dream of God for us and our life together.” Pope Francis proposes that the Beatitudes are the ID card of a Christian; they outline the face of Jesus and his way of life. Now let’s look briefly at each Beatitude.

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs in the kingdom of heaven

The poor in Matthew’s Gospel are not just materially or economically destitute; they are the ones who depend totally on God, who have a heart stripped of worldly things. They are the ones most aware of their frailty. They are the ones who bring their poverty, hoping for sustenance; their brokenness, hoping for healing; their grief, hoping to be comforted; and their sin, hoping to be forgiven. This Beatitude calls us to heighten our awareness of the difference between wants and needs. *We might want to ask ourselves, “What do I need and what do I want? When did, or do, I acknowledge my absolute need for God?”*

Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted

This Beatitude is not just about grieving the death of a loved one or the loss of what will never be. Grief is also about feeling deep pain for the evils and injustices of our world – evil words, evil deeds and evil policies evidenced right here, right now in our own country’s urgent cry for the day when we will live as one nation under God, with liberty and justice for all. Pope Francis said “people who have never felt sadness, angst or sorrow will never know the power of comfort. Those who have the capacity to feel in their hearts the sorrow that exists in their lives and others they will know the tender hand of a God who will comfort them.” *We might want to ponder, “What I am lamenting during these unprecedented, unparalleled pain-filled days? What have I ignored for too many years?”*

Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth

Meekness is often misunderstood as wimpishness, cowardliness, weakness or spinelessness. However, when we listen to and observe Jesus’ actions in the Scriptures, Jesus was certainly not a weakling. He was not one who was fearful of standing up for what was right when he upended the tables of the moneychangers and cleared and cleansed the temple. He was not wimpish when he rebuked the Pharisees and his own disciples when they just didn’t get it. Furthermore, Jesus endured persecution, slander, false accusations and he bore them all with humility, perseverance and even tenderness. While hanging on the cross, he prayed to his Abba God, “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

One author describes meekness as “power under control,” meaning exercising power for the benefit of all. In our world, it can be challenging to put our power under God’s control. It seems like the self-promoting, the arrogant and the politically and economically powerful appear to win but in the end, they lose the priceless gift of the respect of many because of their actions. *We might want to ask ourselves, “Do I live by the principle by which Jesus lived that the power of love overcomes the love of power?”*

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

In this Beatitude, Jesus blessed those who are making things right. He praises those who advocate for basic human rights for every single human being on this Earth: for those who are dehumanized, degraded or discriminated against and the list goes on. *We might want to ask ourselves, "What wrongs do I see and what can I do to do the right thing for others?"*

Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy

This Beatitude is not about pity or sympathy but about entering into the pain of another with deep compassion and empathy. It's about reaching out with love to all without exception. William Barclay, in his book *The Gospel of Matthew*, describes mercy as "The ability to get right inside other people's pain until we can see with their eyes, think with their minds and feel things with their feelings." James Martin writes that the Good Samaritan was a man from a hated ethnic group yet he was the one who cared for the stranger on the wayside. He says, "Jesus forced His listeners to confront their prejudices about others and their perceptions about God." *We might want to ask ourselves, "What do I need to change in myself to become colorblind when I become aware of inequity and injustice?"*

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God

Joan Chittister has an image of pure. She says, suppose after a rain, we come upon a clear puddle. If we stir the puddle with a stick it clouds up and turns muddy. The analogy is when we see our motives and intentions as clouded, we lose our purity of heart and our ability to see another as h/she is – a noble person of goodness and decency. *We might want to ask ourselves, "Do I see the face of God in everyone I meet?"*

Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called daughters and sons of God

Peace is not simply an absence of hostility, but a healing and bringing together in homes, schools, workplaces, churches and other areas of society wherever there is conflict. There cannot be peace where there is racism or prejudice or exploitation. Peacemakers are mediators of unity and reconciliation.

The peacemaker who comes to mind is Martin Luther King Jr. As I was preparing this reflection, I unexpectedly came across a speech he gave at Grosse Pointe High on March 14, 1968. It was titled "The Other America." He spoke of substandard housing, unemployment and underemployment, poverty, imbedded racism and the need for strong civil rights legislation and he reminded the audience that Americans living in the "Other America" are still waiting for the promise of freedom and justice for all.

Turning the page backward to Aug. 28, 1963, he said:

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of slaves and the sons of former slave owner will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with words of interposition and nullification, one day right down in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hand with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.

This is our hope. This is the faith I go back to the south with.

Today, with faith and trust that God is in the middle of the peaceful demonstrations around the world, let us not forget to remember that the whole wide world is in God's hands. It is our hope too, Martin, that your dream will come to fruition. We too pray that our heightened awareness of injustice and inequality will move us beyond dreams to real change in our words, our deeds and our actions so that we will join hands in peace and justice for all.