

“The Countermyth”

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

Matthew 5:3

Perhaps you recognize this as the beginning of the Beatitudes, or ‘Blessings’.

That is what the word ‘beatitude’ means – ‘blessings’.

They are also ‘Be Attitudes’ for what it *should* mean to be a Christian or anyone, for that matter.

At first glance it would seem that the Beatitudes are just a list of blessings – with each one having a condition and a promise...

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.

Notice that they begin and end with ‘the kingdom of heaven’

which suggests a cyclic pattern or sequence – like a story.

While preparing to preach about this passage recently for my church,

it occurred to me that the Beatitudes just might be

what progressive Christian scholars call the ‘countermyth’

to the Myth of Redemptive Violence.

You may never have heard of ‘The Myth of Redemptive Violence’ before,

but I am quite sure that you are familiar with what it is about -

because it is the basic plot for all kinds of ‘hero stories’,

like action movies, Westerns, and even cartoons.

Take “Popeye the Sailor” cartoon, for example...

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So, the bad guy Bluto comes to town and bullies everyone.

His lusts after Olive Oyl and abducts her.

Popeye shows up to save Olive Oyl,
but he gets clobbered by Bluto.

Fortuitously, a can of spinach shows up
and Popeye eats the spinach, gets energized,
and clobbers Bluto right back.

Olive Oyl is rescued and they all live happily ever after...
that is, until next week's episode!

No matter how often we see this, don't we love this classic hero story
of the bad guy terrorizing everybody,

until the good guy rides into town on his white horse
to beat up or even kill the bad guy, and save civilization?

That is until, someone like Dylan Roof walks into a church
and kills nine defenseless people,
while thinking he is saving white civilization...

'The Myth of the Hero's Journey' unfortunately is susceptible
to become 'The Myth of Redemptive Violence'
through the mechanism of scapegoating.

If the Beatitudes are not just a list of blessings, but are a legitimate
'countermyth' to the false hero story of Redemptive Violence,
then the real "hero" is the victim.

It is the victim who courageously faces the Powers that Be and absorbs their malice,
who is on a hero's journey of transformation
from the passive condition of oppression
to a proactive position of liberation, even despite renewed persecution.

The 'countermyth' begins and ends with the 'kingdom of heaven'
or inclusively-speaking, the 'beloved community',
because when you begin this journey, you are already there.

This dynamic is not limited to the Christian tradition
though it is the story of Jesus of Nazareth,
and the story of Martin Luther King, Jr.,
but it is also the story of Mohandas Gandhi of India,
and of the Jews during the Holocaust,
of black people in the American South, of LGBTQ people,
and of nameless innocents of war in Syria, the Sudan,
the Yazidis of Iraq, Coptic Christians, Parisian concert goers,
immigrant Mexicans, the school children of Newtown,
handicapped people, anyone unjustly treated,
and always women and children everywhere.

Listen and hear now a new translation of the Beatitudes...

Inspired by Matthew 5:1-16

AND SEEING THE CROWDS, [JESUS] WENT UP THE MOUNTAIN.
AND HE SAT DOWN WHEN HIS DISCIPLES HAD CLIMBED UP
AND WERE BEFORE HIM.
AND FROM HIS LIPS CAME THIS TEACHING...

“TO BE RIPENED ARE THOSE WHO ARE CHALLENGED BY
POVERTY AND DISABILITY,
FOR THEIRS IS THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF HEAVEN.
TO BE RIPENED ARE THOSE WHO SUFFER,
FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.
TO BE RIPENED ARE THOSE WHO ARE HUMBLLED,
FOR THEY SHALL WIN IT ALL IN THE END.
TO BE RIPENED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST
FOR JUSTICE, FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED.
TO BE RIPENED ARE THOSE WHO ARE MERCIFUL,
FOR THEY THEMSELVES SHALL RECEIVE MERCY.
TO BE RIPENED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PURE IN HEART,
FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD IN ACTION.
TO BE RIPENED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PEACE-BUILDERS,
FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD.
TO BE RIPENED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED
FOR THE SAKE OF JUSTICE, FOR THEIRS, TOO,
IS THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF HEAVEN.

AND TO BE RIPENED ARE THOSE OF YOU WHO WILL BE CURSED, P
ERSECUTED, AND ACCUSED OF ALL KINDS OF TERRIBLE THINGS –
AH, FALSELY ON MY ACCOUNT.
REJOICE AND ANTICIPATE THE GREAT REWARD THAT
AWAITS YOU IN THE HEAVENS
FOR THE PROPHETS WERE ABUSED IN THE SAME WAY.
YOU ALL ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH,
BUT WHEN SEASONING BECOMES TASTELESS,
WITH WHAT SHALL IT BE MADE SAVORY AGAIN?
WHY, IT IS GOOD FOR NOTHING... YET EVEN THEN
IT CAN BE THROWN OUT ON SLIPPERY WALKWAYS.
YOU ALL ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD;
A CITY BUILT ON A HILL CANNOT BE HIDDEN.
NO ONE LIGHTS A LAMP AND PLACES IT UNDER A BASKET,
BUT ON A LAMPSTAND, SHINING FORTH
TO ALL THOSE IN THE HOUSE.
IN THIS WAY, YOUR LIGHT MUST SHINE FORTH
IN THE SIGHT OF ALL HUMANITY THAT THEY MAY SEE
YOUR GOOD WORKS AND PRAISE FOR YOUR BELOVED GUARDIAN
WHO IS IN THE HEAVENS.