

## “The Be-Attitudes”

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Micah 6:1-8

Matt. 5:1-12

‘[Jesus said,]

“Blessed are the poor in spirit...

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Matt. 5:3a, 10’

Let us pray... O God,

Teach us to worship you in spirit and truth

and may that be reflected in our everyday lives in how we treat each other.

Amen

My New Year’s resolution is to do some creative project –

and this year that is to memorize and tell Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount”.

I have been meaning to do this for a while.

I did a paraphrase of this text back in 2008,

putting Jesus’ message into a contemporary context,

using my own words to interpret what

God is still speaking to us through this text.

It probably came to my attention to do this around the time

there was a legal dispute about a federal judge who refused

to order a large stone monument of the 10 Commandments

be removed from a public place.

The news media observed with some irony that Christians

ought to be more concerned with the display of the Sermon on the Mount.

More recently, I read a book called Jesus Through The Centuries

which described how Jesus was ‘rediscovered’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

as a ‘liberator’ primarily through his words

and particularly through the Sermon on the Mount.

It was this text that was the common thread between Russian novelist

Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi who successfully guided India to independence

from Great Britain, and Martin Luther King who waged a nonviolent

campaign for civil rights in American society and peace in Vietnam.

Willard, p.2

A number of you participated in a Bible study of Matthew 5-7 this fall;  
It so happens that the lectionary readings for the next month  
include much of this text.

So, “The Sermon on the Mount” will be the theme of my sermons  
leading into Lent.

You have heard the reading from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible,  
now I would like you to hear my interpretation of the beginning  
of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount...

Inspired by Matthew 5:1-12

**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 HONORED ARE THOSE WHO ARE CHALLENGED BY  
POVERTY AND DISABILITY,  
FOR THEIRS IS THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF HEAVEN.**

**TO BE HONORED ARE THOSE WHO SUFFER,  
FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.**

**TO BE HONORED ARE THOSE WHO ARE HUMBLED,  
FOR THEY SHALL WIN IT ALL IN THE END.**

**TO BE HONORED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER AND THIRST  
FOR JUSTICE, FOR THEY SHALL BE SATISFIED.**

**TO BE HONORED ARE THOSE WHO ARE MERCIFUL,  
FOR THEY THEMSELVES SHALL RECEIVE MERCY.**

**TO BE HONORED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PURE IN HEART,  
FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD IN ACTION.**

**TO BE HONORED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PEACE-BUILDERS,  
FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED THE CHILDREN OF GOD.**

**TO BE HONORED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED  
FOR THE SAKE OF JUSTICE, FOR THEIRS, TOO,  
IS THE BELOVED COMMUNITY OF HEAVEN.**

**AND TO BE HONORED ARE THOSE OF YOU WHO WILL  
BE CURSED AND PERSECUTED 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.**

Willard, p.3

The text begins with Jesus seeing crowds gathering to him  
out of their need for help or out of curiosity;

So, he climbs up a mountain and waits for those who really want to listen  
to climb up, too.

Then, he begins his talk with what has come to be known as the Beatitudes –  
or the ‘Be-attitudes’, which is like a song or poem with its repetitive form.

Overall, it describes the character of those who follow Christ –

in fact it describes Jesus of Nazareth himself as generous, hopeful, courageous,  
motivated, merciful, enchanted, peaceful, defiantly joyful, and loving.

There are 8 ‘beatitudes’ or blessings and a 9<sup>th</sup> that is directed at the listeners  
specifically.

Note that the first and the eighth beatitudes have the phrase

‘kingdom of heaven’ – which suggests that this wisdom poem

also describes a path that begins and ends with

the kingdom of heaven, which might otherwise be called ‘beloved community’.

It is cyclic, like the seasons of the earth, the life cycle of a human being,  
the historical eras of life on earth.

It is cyclic because it is the path we all find ourselves in at one point or another.

The first lesson is to recognize that everyone is challenged,

we are all poor in the spirit at one point or another;

So, it is important to recognize – as the saying goes,

that we ought to ‘be kind to the next person we meet

because they’re going through a hard fight’.

That means we are not to judge, but to listen and see *the person*

who is in the midst of those challenges.

And it follows that those who suffer and mourn should be comforted

and likewise we should faithfully hold out for consolation

when it happens to us.

We should not be contemptuous of people who are humiliated,

and when it happens to us, we should not lose faith,

but trust God will provide restoration and renewal.

Then, there is a transformation from wounded-ness, hunger, and thirst

to pro-active intention to bring about justice despite privation

healing despite wounding.

We are to recognize when people are fighting for a just cause

and to join in, too.

Mercy is its own reward, as is a pure heart, and the striving for peace;

These are characteristics that the ‘struggle’ part of the Beatitudes cycle  
brings forth from someone.

Willard, p. 4

But then the cycle comes back to the challenge of persecution  
which is equated with being poor in spirit, impoverished, or disabled.  
Yet regardless of the circumstances of where we are on life's journey,  
we are all in it together, though we have choices about  
recognizing and embracing our responsibility to work for  
the transformation of wounding to healing, privation to salvation.  
Here are some ideas for us to welcome those who are challenged,  
mourn, suffer, and struggle and to proactively  
demonstrate mercy, creativity, and peace.

In the wake of the Tucson shootings,  
we can join the call for legislation to take 'high capacity magazines'  
for ammunition off the market.  
We can hold a prayer vigil calling for us all to personally commit to  
a more civil discourse.  
We can fast for Lent by finding ways to give up carbon  
for the sake of our environment.  
We can join the call for Publix to insist on the fair treatment and pay  
of the migrant farm-workers who pick their tomatoes.  
We can begin by making a visit to see firsthand what life is like for  
the farm-worker community in Dade City – and what they have to teach us.  
We can help promote understanding between the youth of  
the communities of our area – like Jose from Dade City,  
Michaela from Wildwood, and Henry from the Villages.  
Perhaps the next generation will more readily see the interconnectedness  
of our cyclic journey together as individuals and as a people  
towards that beloved community that is possible as a social reality,  
'on earth as it is in heaven'.

Amen

The Jewish scriptures often contain voices speaking in dialogue –  
those of the prophet, of God, and of the people.  
In Micah 6:1-8, we have the classic words of God’s affirmation of justice  
and expectation that human beings should do likewise...

Reader 1:

1 Hear what the Lord says:

Rise, plead your case before the mountains,  
and let the hills hear your voice.

2 Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the Lord,  
and you enduring foundations of the earth;  
for the Lord has a controversy with his people,  
and he will contend with Israel.

Reader 2:

3 ‘O my people, what have I done to you?

In what have I wearied you? Answer me!

4 For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,  
and redeemed you from the house of slavery;  
and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

5 O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised,  
what Balaam son of Beor answered him,  
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,  
that you may know the saving acts of the Lord.’

Reader 1:

6 ‘With what shall I come before the Lord,  
and bow myself before God on high?  
Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,  
with calves a year old?

7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,  
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?  
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,  
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’

Reader 2:

8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God?

Matt.5:1-12

[1] Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to 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 those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

[5] "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

[6] "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

[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 sons of God.

[10] "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

[11] "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

[12] Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.