

Norman Kennedy Presbyterian Church
July 12, 2020

Sermon Series: The Teacher According to Matthew

Sung Prayer of Illumination:

Come Holy Spirit, I need you

Come sweet Spirit, I pray

Come in your strength and your power

Come in your own gentle way

Scripture Readings: Responsive Psalm 65 (responsive)
Matthew 5:1-16 (ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Sermon Title: 'Have a heart'

The Gospel reading this morning, which is the same from last week, draws us into the section of the sermon on the mount, which is indeed "the most significant words ever spoken; their simplicity is deceptive. There is gold under the ground," -Frederick Dale Brunner said this in his commentary on Matthew's gospel – to which I owe a great deal of insight as I study Matthew's gospel. Therefore, it is certainly worth 2 Sundays of focus in that these beatitudes can be divided between those which are blessings **upon** those in great need and blessings **for** those who offer help.

Today's set of beatitudes focuses on the heart with the reminder to all of us – 'to have a heart'. In other words, show kindness and compassion, be willing to walk a mile in another's shoes, identify with all the great needs of all whom we journey this life with - this is what Jesus is teaching in this sermon.

In this teaching, we need to hear loud and clear who it is that are 'blessed' or shown grace and favour. Last week we saw that at first it is those who

have great need. They are the poor in spirit, the poor in joy, the poor in power, the poor in righteousness – those are the suffering conditions of life and experiences many identify with – and if we are all honest, those are or have been our condition from time to time.

Today we see a different set of blessings. The last in this list are blessings on those who are active in providing help – the helps of mercy, purity, peace, and endurance.

We do well to remember that the blessings in all these conditions, are gifts of grace. We need the spirit of God to enable us so to see.

Matthew's gospel tells us that this teaching was at the very beginning of Jesus ministry. This means it is foundational to belief that the Saviour of the world came to change the world. The Kingdom of God and His Christ would be a radical, upside down, kingdom – and it would be established if and when we grasp and live in these ways of service and love.

This second set of beatitudes for our consideration begin by asking that we would 'have a heart', - **have a heart** for those who are trying to make a difference – identify with them, be of help to them, be one of them!

We begin with those who show mercy. One of the early church fathers helps us see what this means. He said the merciful person "counts others misery as his own, and is as sad at their grief as at his own." We may remember a phrase Jesus used on a few occasions when he said "I want mercy not sacrifice." Jesus' call is for us to be merciful- and when we are, we will be blessed. In what way do we show mercy – it's more than sympathy, more than feeling sorry or even sad for another. The idea of mercy from scripture is "coming to the aid of another"; or "taking on another person's troubles as if it was your own." Just a bit later in the sermon on the mount, Jesus teaches us to pray with this phrase - "as we forgive our debtors". In this beatitude we are promised mercy as a result of being merciful. I know I need God's mercy – but do I need it enough so that I show mercy to others? How you and I pass mercy on to others is how we will have experiences of mercy from our heavenly Father. To be truthful, I suspect I am missing out on this blessing.

The next beatitude challenges us about our heart – which is really about the center of our being. What is most at the center of life for us – we may think of relationships, or of pursuits of happiness, or of fulfillment and accomplishments in professional or career goals. Some of us may even think of growth or fulfillment in our Christian life. But I challenge us to think on this question - do any of us have pure motives in anything? Our desire for God, our motives will only be pure when we realize that our knowing of God, our seeking after God comes by faith because God **is** gracious, because God **is** faithful and because God **is** trustworthy in all of the details of my life. We are blessed, when we are pure in heart. Are we missing out on that blessing as well?

Because we read scripture from the perspective of time and place, it is encouraging to hear the words of blessing on peacemakers. In our upbringing in a country where peace is valued and maintained mostly – we can easily identify with peacekeeping. We do this as a nation among other nations of the world, we do this in communities when we respect the multi-cultural nature of society, we do this when we say 'I'm sorry' a lot as Canadians are prone to do – but is this what Jesus is talking about?

Not entirely.

The peacemaker Jesus talks about is the 'whole maker' – this is the person who is concerned for the comprehensive well-being of every person and every situation. This is both an internal peace and an external peace. The Biblical word is 'shalom'. Shalom conveys the picture of a circle of well-being in every direction (*in and out*) and in every relationship (*close and distant*). So, blessed are the circle makers is a better way to understand this beatitude. Peacemakers are reconcilers – they bring peace in every way with every one. That means in every circle which you are part of – the circle of your entire being, the circle of your household, the circle of your family, the circle of your community, the circle of your church, the circle of the world. It is these people who are called children of God. So, we ask – am I / are you one of those peacemakers?

Jesus was a peacemaker – he brought wholeness to all he ministered to – in physical ways, in relational ways, in spiritual ways. He offers blessings to us

when we do the same. The ultimate peacemaking of Jesus was in his death and resurrection whereby we who believe gained peace and wholeness with God the Father. Therefore, thereafter - we too are called children of God. What a blessing that is!

Jesus wants to give blessings – such are his gifts to us – but he teaches at the very beginning of his ministry that such blessings are not what would be presumed by the idea of ‘God helps those who help themselves.’

The blessings of God are for those who can’t help themselves – for those in great need and for those who help those in great need.

However, this section of what Matthew includes as part of Jesus’ sermon is not finished yet.

Jesus offers one more blessing – it is to those who are persecuted. It seems Jesus is preparing the disciples for what their life of following him will be like – it will be a life of unpopularity, of rejection, of loneliness, of abuse – persecution for righteousness sake he calls it. If for the first disciples, so also for those of us who follow Jesus today. So all the good that we will do when we live with these kingdom values, will be met with some level of persecution. That’s reality. That’s scary. That is hardly a blessing – at least in our naïve view.

Living in the new ‘Jesus’ kingdom and accepting its values will get us into trouble – but if you’re in trouble it best be for the right reasons. The right reason is righteousness. The right reason is, as the apostle Paul wrote - “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope”.

The Beatitudes show us a God of immense love and mercy – a God who wants to help needy people and a God who challenges all ‘when we have received blessing to go and be a blessing to others.’

As we come to the end of our worship today, there will be prayers relating to each of the beatitudes – consider your own need of blessing, and pray along with the words which will be read that you may receive such blessings and

then go a be a blessing to others in their need and in fulfillment of God's mission in this world.

In that way, Jesus goes on to say – in that way, **you are** the salt of the earth and the very light of the world! Therefore, God will be well-pleased by our kingdom living both now and when we sometime /someday share that living in His new heaven and new earth. Blessed we are and will be!

Thanks be to God. Amen.