

Norman Kennedy Presbyterian Church
July 5, 2020

Sermon Series: The Teacher According to Matthew

Prayer of Illumination: (sung) 'Open my eyes that I may see'

Scripture Readings: Responsive Psalm 145:8-14 (responsive)
Matthew 5:1-16 (New Century Version)

This is the Word of the Lord
Thanks be to God

Sermon Title: 'There's gold in these hills'



The sermon title today comes from a cartoon. You may recognize it because you have probably seen the episode – it was called the '14 carrot rabbit'. And yes it starred Bugs Bunny. Here's your tidbit of trivia for today – Bugs would be 80 years old this year – he was created and appeared on July 27th 1940. In the episode I refer to Bugs declares "there's gold in them there hills"! How'd he know that? – well he had a strange way of knowing – it so happened that anytime he was near or nigh unto a place where gold could be found – his whole body would shake. Now, Bugs was not all that interested in gold but his 'friend' – more like his rival, Yosemite Sam – he was very interested and intrigued by Bugs' strange reaction. Therefore it would be to his advantage to form a partnership with Bugs. Off they go together to search for gold. Sure enough when Bugs would shake, Yosemite

Sam would start to dig. Typical of the cartoon, Bugs takes great pleasure in slyly getting even with those who were trying to pull something over on him. Since I think most of us here remember those cartoons -- you may find yourself smiling as you hear in your memory Bugs' distinct voice "there's gold in them there hills!"

We have just read in Matthew's gospel a portion that is pure gold. But like real gold – it has to be mined – it has to be brought to the surface – it has to change us.

This section of Matthew's gospel is the beginning of what is commonly called 'the sermon on the mount'. And I begin by quoting commentator Frederick Dale Brunner, who says – "these are the most significant words ever spoken; their simplicity is deceptive. There is gold under the ground."

And so my friends, this morning, let's start our dig for gold!

When I introduced this sermon series a few weeks ago - I mentioned that our intention would be to gain insight to those things we are to teach and demonstrate as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission. Remember Jesus words as he was about to ascend back to his Father - "*Therefore go and make disciples ... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*" Matthew gives us, in great detail, this inaugural sermon of Jesus – addressed specifically to the disciples but we should also note it was delivered in the hearing of a crowd.

These words would be and are for all people through-out all time.

As I did last week, I want to mention something from near the end of the Gospel reading first – and that is Jesus words and *my* emphasis – **YOU** are the salt of the earth, **YOU** are the light of the world! You, as in the disciples, **as also in You and Me** – we who call ourselves Christian today – we who say we follow Jesus, we live or try to live by the Word of God. Jesus believes that when his disciples believe, obey and teach his sermon they become the witnesses he wanted them to be – because they (we) too are agents of healing to a sick and dark world.

Just before this sermon, Jesus had already begun his ministry proclaiming good news and healing (we should take note – Jesus offered Gospel &

Action). We know that physical healing was significant in Jesus' ministry – the healing ministry of Jesus, often physical, but it was also healing of mind and soul and circumstances. We would do well to remember that as disciples today. We too are to be those who bring 'healing' – healing words and actions to people and places in need!

So then let's examine more of how the beatitudes can change us and change the world?

The first thing we must note is that **Jesus begins this teaching not with demands but with blessings.** Grace precedes law – it did when Moses came down the mountain with the 10 commandments and God's words were – "I am the Lord your God who brought you out..." – the people were saved from Egypt first, then given the law.

In Matthew 3 it is recorded that at Jesus' baptism, God spoke "this is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased." It was an act of God's grace in sending His Son- so therefore when Jesus opens his mouth to teach we must listen.

Here, recorded for us by Matthew, are 9 blessings (always called the beatitudes) and 2 affirmations (we could call them the 'you are's').

Let's get to the gold!

We begin by hearing grace first. In the first 4 beatitudes especially, we can conclude that God simply blesses broken people.

- "Blessings on the poor in spirit, because theirs is the kingdom of heaven."
- "Blessings on the broken hearted, because they will be comforted."
- "Blessings on the little people (*commonly understood as the powerless*), because they will be granted the earth."
- Blessings on those who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness, because they will be satisfied."

The world is full of people in need – people who know and feel their own emptiness – for some there is a physical dimension to that emptiness, for others it may be a psychological, emotional, relational, spiritual emptiness.

These are the people, in the world's opinion, and sometimes their own, who don't measure up. Failures, broken, empty. A song writer/musician whom I know from my years of ministry in southern Ontario, Glen Soderholm, - some of you may recall the time, about 10 years ago, when we hosted him here for a workshop and a concert. Glen wrote a song which was titled 'Everything is broken.' One of the lines in his song says this - "streets are filled with broken hearts, broken words never meant to be spoken, (and) it feels like you're choking - (because) everything is broken."

Jesus is saying to the broken - 'blessed'. Blessed! You are, you will be blessed. Sometimes in an attempt to understand the beatitudes better we substitute the word 'happy' for blessed. We should not, especially when happy can be the shallowness of a jovial and lucky feeling. Blessed, blessings are the better words because there is so much more to this word as it is used in the Bible. A pronouncement of blessing on you in the Biblical sense is an action. **When God blesses, something happens.** Hear that again - **When God blesses, something happens.** It is a declaration of something that will be the final decision. Examples to help us grasp this might be how 'declarations are used in our society' - in sports an umpire or referee will declare or pronounce a strike or a penalty - arguing against that declaration will get you nowhere. When a judge upon hearing evidence, declares / pronounces the verdict of guilty or innocent - so be it, the person is as the judge declared. In a wedding ceremony, when the minister or officiant, uses words such as 'by the power invested in me by the province of Saskatchewan, I pronounce you husband and wife' - then it is as it is declared.

And so in this first set of beatitudes focused on the needy, the mournful, the powerless, and the empty people, Jesus is saying that your experience, your crisis, your down and out condition, your real and heavy sadness, your reality of being nobody - to all those identifying with these situations, the blessing he offers is Himself. It's as if Jesus announces/declares - **"look-up! I am here, taking your side, and the kingdom I bring is especially for you!"** This acknowledgement of need is the first step to blessing. Probably the most well-known of help organizations, Alcoholics Anonymous, declares that affirmation, that without supernatural help the individual will not see

the change they long for. We are all helpless without God's help. Shame on those who have turned this or other parts of scripture around to say that blessings, God's blessings are on the rich.

We do not make ourselves poor in spirit, broken-hearted, or meek / nor do we pray for these experiences – these are just situations that befall some or even all at one time or another. We may know of some in those situations even on this day. Jesus words here are amazing. He promises the poor in spirit, the broken-hearted, and the meek **everything** when he says they will inherit the earth.

So much for those who are self-made, achievers, entrepreneurs, earth-shakers so to speak who want or decide to have something and who will move heaven & earth to get it. They may end up with fame and riches in this life BUT the meek, the powerless, the little guy – they are promised the earth, the whole earth which will indeed be the renewed earth, the future earth, the place of God's coming kingdom!

The last of the 4 'need' beatitudes is one that we should pray to experience – it is a blessing upon those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. This is a desire to be a doer of God's will. Later in this sermon on the mount, we will be told to "seek first God's kingdom". We are to be people in constant need of, desire for, and the pursuit of God – who He is, His will, His ways. We will be blessed if we are those who do that.

So there's gold in them there hills which could be each one of the Beatitudes. We only got to consider 4 today, we will finish with the others next week. All together they are the gold standard of the kingdom Jesus came to introduce and inaugurate. His was to be a kingdom unlike anything the disciples, and the listening audience would have expected. It is unlike anything we often expect – it is counter-cultural, it is uncomfortable, it is crazy. But if we seek God and His kingdom, if we want to live in and experience His love and grace – then this is the Gospel for us. Living out that Gospel is God's call on our lives.

Matthew records this as a first sermon which Jesus preached – it's lengthy and is all of grace! It was coined the sermon on the mount but its content is actually for those in the valleys of life. And if we are truthful with ourselves

we are all in the valley. Woody Allen once said –“most of the time I am not having much fun. The rest of the time I am having no fun at all.” Is life really that depressing? It can be. It will be if it is focused always and only on ourselves. Thank God he brings us to a higher plain, he takes us to the mount, he invites us to mine for gold – and from His words and teaching He offers us joy and happiness and satisfaction and peace among all his gifts.

The kingdom Jesus calls us to embrace is an upside down way of thinking and acting.

Be blessed – may you be blessed as you think and act on these upside down values and experiences in this coming week.

Thanks be to God for His word. Amen.