

Sermon for Feb 2, 2014

How many of you look at these verses and think as I once did that Jesus was setting up the conditions for us to be blessed instead of giving actual blessings to people who were already in these conditions? Do you look at them and wonder—am I pure enough; am I merciful enough, do I mourn enough? And then I think again and I tell God that I don't want to be without hope. I don't want to mourn. I don't want to be without justice. I don't want to be persecuted!

Our problem isn't with the Beatitudes—it's with the way that we think about God and blessing. When I was teaching confirmation in my home congregation we participated in the Bible study for the Purpose Driven Life. In it one of the questions was about how you picture God. When the confirmation kids were asked they answered that they see God as a wise and loving grandfather. When the older people in the congregation were asked how they see God they answered that they picture God as a stern judge ready to meat out punishment to wrong doers and unable to give blessings before certain requirements were met. How did we get so far away from our childlike faith?

One reason could be that we have a harder time as adults believing that God would want to bless us in the first place. We don't feel that we are worthy of God's grace and mercy. Why? Because we know ourselves too well. We know all of our faults and failures and we know that God knows us better than we know ourselves! So why would God love us unconditionally? There isn't much in our world that is unconditional. We're used to being told to toe the line; that we'll reap the consequences from our actions. So is it no wonder that we can't believe that

God would bless us unless we've done something to earn or deserve that blessing?

And that leads us back to our Gospel reading for today. If we look closer at what Jesus is saying and doing; he isn't setting conditions for blessings—he's blessing people. All of the people—as they are! He blesses those without hope; those who mourn; those who have no voice—the outcasts; the vulnerable; those at the bottom of every economic ladder. Why? Because Jesus is showing us just how radical God's love can be—showing up with mercy and blessing in the places we would least expect God to be!

This isn't where the people of Jesus' time would look for God. This isn't where we look for God. Would we look for God with the poor instead of the rich; with the meek and peacemakers instead of with the strong and victorious? But think about it; if God shows up here with the weak and vulnerable, then God will be everywhere, blessing all of creation!

This week I want you all to hear that God loves you and wants the very best for you! God thinks that you are worthy of God's blessings! Let me say that again—God loves you—you with all of your faults and foibles and wants to bless you! Have you ever wondered where the phrase, “God bless you” comes from? It began in the middle ages. Whenever someone would sneeze people said, “God bless you” to whoever sneezed fearing that they may have the plague. This phrase that we so nonchalantly say every time someone sneezes began as a way to ward off evil, disease and death. This week I want us to reclaim this phrase to signify joy, delight and God's new life. If we can reclaim this maybe we

can also reclaim the fact that our God delights in creating, blessing and redeeming us—God’s beloved children!

Listen to these words of blessing; hear them not only with your ears, but with your heart and remember them:

The God of glory dwell in you richly,
name you beloved,
and shine brightly on your path;
and the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, + the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.
Amen.