

Pastor Greg Briggs, Interim

Sunday, July 1, 2018

Prayer and Introduction

- a. “May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, our rock and redeemer.” Amen. (Psalm 19:14)
 - b. “The hopeless and the grieving”
2. New Sermon Series
- a. Parallel our last series on 10 commandments
 - i. 4 weeks of short verses about lists of things God prefers
 - b. Partially inspired by a Kurt Vonnegut quote from his book *A Man without a Country* published in 2005
 - i. “For some reason, the most vocal Christians among us never mention the Beatitudes (Matthew 5). But, often with tears in their eyes, the demand that the Ten Commandments be posted in public buildings. And of course, that’s Moses, not Jesus. I haven’t heard one of them demand that the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, be posted anywhere.
 - ii. "Blessed are the merciful" in a courtroom? "Blessed are the peacemakers" in the Pentagon? Give me a break!"
 - c. Yet, isn’t this exactly what we hope for with the coming of God’s Kin-dom?
3. Framing the Beatitudes - Jesus’ First Public Act in Gospel of Matthew
- a. Just like in 10 commandments I kept tying them back to the introductory line
 - i. “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”
 - b. the Beatitudes are beginning of Jesus’ first public act, the what we call the Sermon on the Mount
 - i. The beatitudes, therefore, are not observations about reality that others of lesser insight had simply overlooked, such as the truths of mathematics or logic. They are true on the basis of the authority of the one who speaks. (Matthew, New Interpreter’s Bible)
 - ii. Echoing back to God’s authoritative claim for the 10 commandments
 - c. Recap –
 - i. Jesus is born, Magi show up, family flees to Egypt seeking refuge (an important point to remember these days), come back to a different town,
 - ii. gets baptized by John, then tempted in the desert, got some disciples promises to teach them how to fish for people, taught and healed in synagogues.
 - iii. News of him spread, and when he saw the crowds, he went up on the mount
 - d. And he started by teaching –
 - i. Sermon on the Mount – 3 chapters Matthew 5-7
 - e. Beatitudes as introduction - This Informs how foundational these ideas are
 - i. As a rhetorical strategy, I believe the Beatitudes are the start off, the hook.

- ii. Meant to confound, to perplex, to make people think
 - 1. Like a zen koan, or paradox
 - 2. Continues on confusing and confounding expectations
 - a. Come not to abolish law, but to fulfill it
 - b. Then, goes on to tighten the laws
 - i. “you have heard it said _____, but I tell you _____”
 - ii. No murder? Don’t even be angry with your brother or sister
 - iii. No adultery? Don’t be lustful
 - iv. Revenge? No, Turn the other cheek – go the extra mile, overwhelm and shame them with your kindness
4. Paradox of the Beatitudes
 - a. They are not commandments
 - i. Because, we, as Christians, aren’t called to make more hopeless and grieving people.
 - ii. Bouncing back and forth between future (eschatological) promises and current promises
 - 1. Much like God’s kin-dom itself does
 - iii. not "entrance requirements" for outsiders, but a declaration about insiders. (*Matthew New Interpreter’s Bible*)
 - b. So, what is Jesus trying to say?
 - i. Is Jesus promising rewards to people who exhibit various virtues:
 - 1. the poor in spirit may be linked with the unpretentious,
 - 2. those who mourn with the penitent,
 - ii. Or, is it promising reversal to people who live in unfortunate circumstances?
 - 1. poor in spirit are the despondent,
 - 2. those who mourn are the miserable,
 - iii. or is it a bit of both? Regardless,
 - c. these are the ones we should look to. These are the ones who should be honored
 - i. like honoring of our parents from 10 commandments –
 - 1. those that should be looked to, that are the measure of our society
 - ii. Indicator of the orientation of God’s societal structure
 - d. Jesus calls us to serve instead of self-promote
 - i. All the beatitudes apply to one group of people, the real Christians of Matthew's community. They do not describe nine different kinds of good people who get to go to heaven, but are nine declarations about the blessedness, contrary to all appearances, of the eschatological community living in anticipation of God's reign. (*Matthew New Interpreter’s Bible*)
5. The Hopeless and Grieving
 - a. Hopeless - The despondent, who have also lost all pretense?
 - b. Grieving – the Miserable, who are also humbled?
 - c. Know what’s real and what’s a distraction?

- i. See the need for the Kin-dom of God, and have seen glimpses of the kin-dom?
 - d. Large difference between a Rough week, or rough year, and rough life
 - e. Rough life – should be honored, and given a central place in our society. To balance out the all too real and tangible dishonor
 - i. Forcing us to establish universal concerns of justice
 - f. Rough week \ year
 - i. Though painful, perhaps it is also a painful revealing,
 - ii. Have had the scales peeled away from our eyes
 - 1. What are revelations to moderate, middle class, white America have been realities for the poor, the discriminated against, people of color in America – this is why we have so many refugees fleeing to our borders, and we can't be harsh enough to be worse than where they are coming from
 - 2. We are introduced to a new challenge to not lose sight of our blessings, but also struggle with injustice that has been and continues to go on
 - 3. Need to be diligent, almost militant, with taking care of ourselves and others – turn off the news, find ways to lift spirits, less time for trivial, or pretentious concerns
6. Vonnegut's dream
- a. Imagine what that world would look like, using our world today?
 - i. "Blessed are the merciful" in a courtroom
 - ii. "Blessed are the peacemakers" in the Pentagon?
 - iii. "Blessed are the hopeless" on our borders
 - 1. War Department, now is Defense Department, but seems to be in a "the best defense is a good offense"
 - 2. Most of our enemies and problems we've created
 - a. ISIS linked to our invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, which we did to stop the
 - b. Taliban, who we created to help fight the Soviets
 - c. Many of the refugees fleeing to our borders are coming because of the political instability we helped create over the last few generations
 - 3. Where is our Peace Department?
 - a. A bit of the state department, and a bit of the defense department – they've tried to learn from their mistakes, though the rest of us have not
 - b. What would TV look like?
 - i. Keeping up with the Jimenez's or the Lapshansky's.
 - ii. Real single mothers of Atlanta
 - iii. Food network features how our food is grown and picked, featuring migrant workers

- c. Some Hints of it today, in satire and comedy
 - i. Key and Peele – skit about a draft (like the NFL) but for teachers
 - ii. Blackish, Fresh of the Boat,
 - d. Shifts in news
 - i. Move beyond just facts to commentary and analysis
 - ii. Would frame recent discussions about civility to also include earlier efforts, like the move to political correctness
7. Hard path for Christians – balancing Justice and love
- a. To not confuse politeness and passivity
 - b. Civility and civil society
 - i. Civil disobedience is civil. That doesn't make it comfortable. Which is the point, to make uncomfortable and stir towards action and change
 - c. To truly be in covenant with one another, a God centered promise, which includes calling one another to account when straying from the path
 - d. Where do we begin? We start with foundation of our faith – who should be honored?
 - i. Including The hopeless, and the grieving
 - e. Still need to merge Jesus' commandments to love our enemies, and bring about God's kin-dom
 - i. Enact justice, without being vile, or petty
 - ii. Show injustice what injustice feels like – not out of vindictiveness, but to help them love others as we are called to do
 - iii. And remember the difference, as Rev. Dr. MLK said, that people would be treated “based not on the basis of your skin, but the content of your character.”

Readings

Matthew 5:1-4

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. He taught them, saying:

“Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.”