

“The Beatitudes – Week Three”

Pastor Greg Briggs, Interim

Sunday, July 15, 2018

1. 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. Peacemakers, Paradoxes and Woes
2. End of the beginning – final beatitudes – next week is what comes immediately thereafter
 - a. Reminder, the Beatitudes are the beginning of Jesus’ first public teaching, the sermon on the mount
 - b. They are meant to inspire reflection, like a riddle
 - c. Beatitudes as literary form
 - i. Beatitudes weren’t invented by Jesus
 - ii. Often paired with curses, or woes.
 1. Gospel of Luke’s version of the Beatitudes has woes
 - d. Some scholars argue that these last three verses are the closest Matthew gets towards curses.
 - e. Others say that Jesus’ public ministry is a giant bracket of blessings and woes.
 - i. Last public teachings include cursing Jewish leaders, and the parable of the sheep and goats, where people are judged based on how they treat the hungry, sick, naked, and imprisoned
3. Paradoxes and woes
 - a. Today’s readings give a riddle not just within each blessing, but between the last few blessings
 - b. Peacemakers, and then the opposite of peace, harassment, insults, speak falsely and poorly of you
 - c. Let’s look at each verse by itself, then the reading as a whole
4. Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God’s children.
 - a. People who make peace, vs. peacemakers – what people do, vs. job description or defining feature
 - i. How many peacemakers do you know?
 - ii. How many people do you know who make peace?
 1. So many more
 - iii. Not just the Grand “Peace in our time” but the smaller, everyday bits of peace that promote healing
 - b. Focus of our prayers of the people today – back of the bulletin
 - i. What does peace look like?
 - ii. How can you help create peace?
 - iii. Detach from bulletin, place in offering plate – will do offering before prayers
5. Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
 - a. Again, not about being righteous as identity, but just part of who they are
 - b. Again the paradox of being honored because they are being harassed
 - c. Needed words, but goes against societal structures

6. Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. 12 Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.”
 - a. All this has happened before
 - b. Twisted to justify conservative Christian practices
7. Who hates peace?
 - a. Why such hatred of peacemakers, givers of mercy?
 - i. Threat to power
 - ii. Fear of being exposed to one’s unhealed pain
 - b. Power - Because peace and order often get conflated
 - i. Jesus is preaching the overturning of the established social order
 - ii. Again, Jewish people are a conquered people, and Jesus and his parents had to flee for their safety when he was an infant.
 - c. Types of peace – MLK - Letter from Birmingham Jail
 - i. a negative peace which is the absence of tension
 - ii. positive peace which is the presence of justice
 - iii. each of these two types of peace can fall victim to the same critique
 1. can disrupt peace by struggling to maintain peace.
 - a. Negative peace disrupts justice by favoring status quo for calmness
 - b. Positive peace disrupts the status quo seeking justice that has been denied
 2. pay attention to underlying justification. Calmness or justice
 - d. Beatitudes aren’t just about personal attributes, but who should be honored and respected in society
 - i. The powerful would lose their status. Made more explicit in Luke’s version of the Beatitudes
 - ii. Which shows the inequality in society – if it is a truly just society, why should it matter if someone is in power or not
 - iii. “some white people are afraid now that they are going to stop being the majority. Why? Does this country have a bad reputation for how it treats minorities? Should’ve thought of that when you had the ability to change things.”
8. Being a person who makes peace or a person who insult peace
 - a. Yet, it isn’t just whose existing status would be threatened that oppose peace.
 - i. It’s those who have not dealt with their own pain.
 - b. Living a life of seeking righteousness, a life full of mercy and peace is no easy thing, either. So often, it is fueled by a deep and abiding inner need.
 - i. Earlier beatitude - Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. There’s a hunger
 - ii. God seekers, justice seekers, are so often fueled by this inner hunger. Perhaps it’s linked to the hopelessness, or grief, mentioned in the earlier beatitudes.
9. Becoming a peacemaker
 - a. Some of our greatest saints, and some of our greatest villains have very similar back stories.

- i. I believe it's a person's ability and choice of how they frame their challenges, their loves, their fear, their grief, and their desires, that makes the difference.
 - b. Example - Fred Rogers
 - i. Sick child, bullied, and overweight. Teased and called Fat Freddy.
 - ii. "If there wasn't fat Freddy, there wouldn't have been a Mr. Rogers"
 - iii. He was embodying the love and honesty he'd longed for as a child
 - c. Contrary Example – not going to give a counter example of a person, you can insert your own choice
 - i. *"I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain."*
James Baldwin
 - ii. So many of us are ill equipped to deal with our own pain, or care for our healing
 - iii. So often, what is seen as hypocrisy in other's behavior is externalized expressions of their own pain.
 - 1. they tell us, in a twisted and damaging way, what their own pains are, and where they need to be healed
 - 2. That is how we can love our enemies, by seeing them in need of healing, too
 - d. What makes the difference?
 - i. Many factors
 - 1. Patterns of thought
 - 2. Self esteem
 - 3. Resiliency
 - 4. Alternative narrative
 - ii. Many influences
 - 1. Family is key, birth or adoptive
 - 2. Friends \ connections
 - 3. Teachers
 - 4. Faith communities
 - 5. Big Brothers\Big Sisters
 - 6. Therapy for significant trauma
 - e. Lifelong striving – influenced by our past and present circumstances, but not defined by them
 - f. This is a key role of faith and of the church. To be a place of positive formation
 - i. For children
 - ii. For every stage of life
 - iii. And for times of crisis
 - iv. Not just in community, but in skills
 - 1. Prayer
 - 2. Meditation
 - 3. Service
 - 4. Expression of emotions – joy, lament, in words, in song
 - 5.
10. Being Peacemakers – everyday, everyway
- a. Need your input. Need your thoughts

- b. Back of the bulletin – for Prayers of the people
 - i. Share your prayers, hopes, and ways you make peace
- 11. Conclusion of the Beatitudes
 - a. Blessed are some of the most undesirable things
 - i. They contain a seed of God centered love as well
 - b. Woes if we don't also deal with our own pain.
 - i. Blessed if mourning, partially because they are not hiding from their pain
 - c. Never too late to change, to seek to be makers of peace
 - i. Work on ourselves as we work outside our selves

Readings

Matthew 5:9-12 (pg. 880)

9 “Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God’s children.

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