**March 6, 2022 Matthew 5:1-12**

***When I Grow Up***

**Scripture: Matthew 5:1-12 NRSV**

*(1)When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. (2)Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: (3)"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4)"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (5)"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (6)"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (7)"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (8)"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (9)"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (10)"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11)"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12)Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

**Notes:**

1. When we think ***blessing***, we think of material prosperity.
   1. Jesus is interpreting “***blessed***” in a new way.
   2. “***Blessed***” is a description of those who embody meekness and humility.
2. The qualities of the ***blessed***
   1. The ***blessed*** don’t fit the description of the world.
   2. The language is intended to reinterpret the word ***blessing***.
   3. The blessed are persecuted for the sake of ***righteousness***.
   4. ***Righteousness*** is meekness, peacemaking, poor in spirit, doing the right things for the right reasons.
3. What are those who are ***blessed***, blessed with?
   1. The ***blessed*** will receive the kingdom of heaven.
   2. Those who are pure in heart will ***see*** God.
   3. These are the ***blessings*** the kingdom of God.
4. The beatitudes are a way of ***being*** in the world now.
   1. They are not about a ***someday*** kingdom of God,
   2. The Sermon on the Mount elaborates on how those who ***follow*** Christ are to ***live*** in the world.
   3. The kingdom of God is to be ***experienced*** now.
5. To be people of God, we must ***live*** as citizens of the kingdom of God.
   1. ***Live*** in a way that is about meekness, righteousness, poverty of spirit and peacemaking.
   2. “Who do you ***want*** to be?”
   3. Citizens of the kingdom of God are truly ***blessed***.

**Script:**

Growing up I was often asked what I would like to be. The first time I remembered being asked this question, I was in first grade, and we were probably asked because everything that would motivate us to learn in school would revolve around what we would like to be when we grew up and finished our education. I remember many of the girls said they wanted to be a mother; but some wanted to be secretaries, others wanted to be teachers. As for the guys, I remember some wanted to be soldiers, some wanted to be firemen or policemen, and still others wanted to be professional athletes.

What would, or maybe what did, you answer to this question when you were younger? Many of us would have answered in much the same ways. The girls who liked to play house and with dolls would want to be mothers. The boys who would like to play sports would want to athletes. But the questions I want you to consider today is “Who do you want to be?”; “How do you want to act?”; “How do you want to be seen by those around you?”

However, today in our gospel passage, we learn that what we should strive to be is very different. It’s not about what our career or occupation will be, but more about how we should behave and act towards others that is important. Stand with me today and join me in the reading of Matthew 5:1-12

*(1)When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. (2)Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: (3)"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (4)"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. (5)"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (6)"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (7)"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. (8)"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (9)"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (10)"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11)"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12)Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.* ***Matthew 5:1-12 NRSV***

What would you like to be when you grow up? If we were to write a list of being, existing, and doing in our current time and place, I would venture to say it would look vastly different from the list we find in Matthew 5. I’m sure a quick inspection of popular self-help books and podcasts, oriented toward how to succeed in the twenty-first century, would fill in much of this list for us. In fact, the reality that most of these lists, books, and podcasts revolve around the idea of financial prosperity and individual recognition that these things are a telling feature of what we value in our world.

This list might look a bit different from individual to individual, but very likely, looking at the culture as a whole, our list of Beatitudes, our attitudes of how we would like to be, would look more like; “Blessed are those who work hard so they can play later.”; or, “Blessed are those who prioritize themselves and safety over that of their neighbors.”; Or maybe even, “Blessed are the ones who pulled themselves up by their bootstraps.”

I’m sure you can think of others, and although this is maybe a bit of a painful indictment of our own culture, the culture targeted by Matthew 5 wasn’t all that different. They too struggled with wealth inequality, they too struggled with an empire that was easy to worship and obey, they too struggled with a desire for selfishness and security at the expense of other, which is precisely why these words in Matthew 5 were and are so unsettling and subversive.

Jesus was turning culture on its head. The ways of the world are not to be the ways of the people of God. Christians—those who follow after Jesus— are supposed to have completely different attitudes and look at the world in completely different ways. Instead of seeking to get ahead, they are to be meek and humble. Instead of violence, they are to make peace.

This sermon of Jesus is one that still makes us uncomfortable. Our world is not so different. So in this season of Lent, we once again take time to allow ourselves to be unsettled by these words, that we might be transformed to look more like Christ.

We see the words here, “Blessed Are …” When we think of blessing, we often think of material prosperity. The Greek word *makarios* that is interpreted as “blessed” here often meant a form of prosperity, which is in line with what we think of today when we hear “blessed” or “blessing.” A quick search of the hashtag #blessed on any social media platform will bring results of what we think of as blessings in our culture. It usually has to do with prosperity, health, and sometimes family.

However, Jesus is interpreting “blessed” in a new way in the Beatitudes. *Makarios* can be interpreted as either “blessed” or “happy.” Some translations of Scripture interpret *makarios* as “happy,” So it seems that this passage isn’t talking about material wealth and prosperity. The idea of happy may feel odd but helps us understand what Matthew is saying. Those listening would be shocked to hear “blessed” followed by “the poor in spirit.” They would expect to hear Jesus talk favorably about the powerful. Instead, they are witness to a reinterpretation by Jesus of the word “blessed” as a description of those who embody meekness and humility.

The Qualities of the Blessed; this list of those blessed doesn’t fit the description of people we would consider blessed. If we made a list of those who are blessed in our society, what would the list include? Blessed are those who have a high-paying job. Blessed are those who have a lot of social media followers. Blessed are those who have power and influence. Our list of those we believe to be blessed often lines up with what our cultural views as blessing. The list in Matthew, however, is completely different.

This list of those who are blessed is in stark contrast to the power and wealth-hungry boldness of our world. Those who are blessed are the: poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted because of righteousness, and those who are insulted, persecuted, and lied about because of Jesus. It is not the wealthy who are blessed but those who are poor in spirit. We often make a distinction here between poor in spirit and actual poverty. While there is some merit to that, it’s important to note that in Luke 6, the blessing of the kingdom of God is for the materially poor as well (v. 20). It could be that Matthew is making the category broader than Luke, or Matthew could be recognizing that those who are materially impoverished have needs that expand beyond financial concerns.

It is also important to note that, just like our culture elevates and believes that the wealthy are blessed, so did the culture in Matthew’s day. The language isn’t intended to be veiled but to reinterpret blessing for the people who are listening. It is not those who sit in comfort now who are blessed but those who are in mourning. It is not bravado and arrogance that are blessed but meekness. Power and violence are not blessed but mercy, pursuit of righteousness, and peacemaking. It isn’t those who live a life in freedom who are blessed but those who are persecuted for living the life Christ has called them to live.

This is where we often err. We sometimes desire this blessing over the others. We claim persecution when there are consequences for our actions, or we claim persecution in North America because we lose some of our power and influence. This blessing is not to be isolated from the others. Persecution has context here those who are blessed are persecuted for the sake of righteousness (doing right and good things for the right reasons). It is good to remember this blessing in context with the others because the other blessings help us to see what righteousness is; meekness, peacemaking, poor in spirit, a hunger and thirst for righteousness (the right things for the right reasons). Being like Christ, in the ways Christ laid down his rights and became a servant, loving others well these things that lead to persecution are blessed

So what are we blessed with? What are Those Who Are Blessed; Blessed with? Not only are those who are blessed a contrast to culture, but the blessings themselves are a contrast. The expectation would be those blessed would be given material wealth, land, health, etc. But that is not what they are blessed with. Those who are poor in spirit are blessed with the kingdom of heaven. Already this is a departure. It’s not the kingdoms of this world, the systems of power in place around them, but something completely different, bigger, and better. Those who mourn are blessed with comfort. Those who are meek will inherit the earth a contrast from whom we believe the earth belongs to, even in our time. Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled. Those who are merciful will receive mercy. Those who are pure in heart will see God. Those who are peacemakers are called the children of God. Those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness will be blessed with the kingdom of heaven. Note that both those who are poor in spirit and those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness are blessed with the kingdom of heaven.

Again this emphasizes the poetic form of the Beatitudes. These are not meant to be separated and isolated from one another but are supposed to be taken together. It might even be alluding to the fact that, if you are poor in spirit, there’s a good chance you are also being persecuted for the sake of righteousness. These blessings are not the blessings of the world that claim to give us power, control, and wealth. These are blessings of the kingdom of God.

The Beatitudes Are a Way of Being in the World. This section of Scripture is often called “the Beatitudes” because it is about a way of being in the world. These calls to the kingdom of God are not just about a someday kingdom of God, although it’s important to note that much of this passage alludes to a day when all will be made right and the kingdom of God will be fully realized. These calls to the kingdom of God are a way of being in the world *now*. As followers of Jesus, we are called to live as though we are citizens of this kingdom of God even now.

We are to exhibit the traits listed in Matthew 5 *now*. Matthew is filled with illustrations of the kingdom of heaven here and now. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7), which is kicked off with the Beatitudes, elaborates on how those who follow Christ are to live in the world, as citizens of the kingdom of God. We also see the language of the kingdom of God coming to earth as it is in heaven in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6— a prayer that the kingdom of God not just be a place in the distant future but something that is experienced now. People around us see the kingdom of God here and now, when we live as citizens of the kingdom of God by embodying the Beatitudes of the kingdom.

The world has its own beatitudes The world has its own way of living and existing. They usually encompass power, money, violence, and control, but the people of God are first and foremost to live as citizens of the kingdom of God. Even now, we are to live in this already/not-yet kingdom, and that way of being, doing, and existing looks different from the world. It’s not about power and control but meekness and righteousness. It’s not about violence and money but poverty of spirit and peacemaking.

What are your beatitudes? What are your attitudes towards the way you want to be? “How do you want to be seen by those around you?” “How do you want to act?” “Who do you want to be?” Are you willing to be considered among the meek and humble? Are you hungry and thirsty for righteousness? DO you want to be part of the Kingdom of heaven? Do you desire to be filled? Do you have a need for comfort? Are you able to be merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker? These things are only available to you through the mercy and grace of Jesus Christ. Yes and it may mean you might be persecuted, but when we truly follow Jesus these things are possible.

Living in this way may very well cause us hardship in this world—it certainly did for Jesus—but we know from these words that those who live as citizens of the kingdom of God are truly blessed. So, when we are asked what we want to be when we grow up. Here is how I would answer, “When I grow up, I want to be a member of the kingdom of God.” I pray that you have a similar desire, and that in your movement towards this goal that you will fully understand what it takes to be Blessed and that you take the time to be Holy.