

Feb. 13, 2022 Sixth Sunday after Epiphany
Be Happy! The Sermon on the Mount

We share Beatitudes from Matthew 5. [5: 3-10]

A message to the afflicted, neglected, or persecuted:

"Happy the poor/the empty
heaven's reign belongs to them.
Happy those who feel/mourn the anguish of life,
they shall be consoled.
Happy those who yield/the nonviolent,
they shall receive the earth.
Happy those who hunger and thirst for righteous justice,
they will eat and drink their full. ??
Happy those who live in mercy with others,
they will be mercified.
Happy those who are pure within,
they will see God.
Happy those who create peace with others,
they will be named God's sons and daughters.
Happy those who are punished for their virtue,
heaven's reign belongs to them."

The word of God. Praise to you, O Christ.

You may be seated.

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In the name of God, Abba Imma, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

What we have today in this profound text might be called a collection of *'The Gospel's Greatest Hits'*. The Sermon on the Mount seems to have it all: the Beatitudes, the Lord's Prayer, 'You are Light for the World, Salt for the Earth', the Golden Rule, the Birds of the Air, the Lilies of the Field, Build Your Lives on Rock, not Sand'. And some people have said, *'Forget the rest of the New Testament--just give us the Sermon on the Mount.'* That might be insufficient, but it's a point.

As Moses went up the mountain, so Jesus goes up the mountain today, each proclaiming a new order for life. This is where it can be found. Pay attention friends! This is breakthrough material.

Moses series of teachings all begin with 'Thou shalt not', but Jesus is a series of consolations--for the afflicted, for the rejected, for the neglected, and for the persecuted. These are all paradoxes that Jesus is using throughout the Sermon on the Mount, but especially in the Beatitudes. But?? they are primarily ethical paradoxes, turning things upside down, inside out,

topsy-turvy, not because spiritual practices should make people work.?? That's not the point. [Jesus] is teaching to alleviate us from the distortions which surround us, inside and out. He is teaching to put us in touch with reality. That's what these are about--reality.

I know, we all go, '*They're so hard. They're so strange. They're so different!*' That's right! As Paul said, 'We live inside of mirrors, and smoke, and images, and reflections and darkness.' And, of course, things are distorted.

These are truth teachings, going for the heart in the core of each of us. So, I've given you a tremendous resource today, and every one of these goes home, right? These are to be studied thoroughly for the next seven weeks--or pass them to your friends.

But the worst thing that you can do in a classroom is give students a piece of paper, and then ask them to listen to the teacher, right? Nobody does it. So I'm going to give you a minute and 15 seconds to read everything. Just scan The Sermon on the beatitude [Mount] ?? material on these first two pages. Go ahead, and look it over for the next minute. You don't have to learn it all.

[7:40] Alright. It's a lot. It's a lot, and these are spiritual gems, which are meant to just sink in, touch, go deeper, to be absorbed over the course of time. So it's not about mastering it in one day. In fact, most scholars, suspect that what Jesus was doing was teaching these things all the time, repeatedly. And that Matthew, then draws these together to just hone it: 'Here's the core. Pay attention!'

So if you can, fold the bulletin and put it down, because what I'd like you to experience is a sense of the gems just soaking in. So what's going to happen is that Jen [Clyde] will just read the core of each of the Beatitudes

She will read it one once. There will be a little time to absorb. She'll read it again, and then I'm going to make just a couple comments on each, and we're just going to repeat that pattern (so you don't have to look at anything at this point). You get to take it home. Just trying to absorb this great wisdom, and freedom, that Jesus is offering us in the Beatitudes.

Jen: Happy the poor. Happy the poor.

The poor are not envious of riches. They're willing to reject the arrogance that so often accompanies riches. They will not oppress the poor; they will stand with them. But the non-poor, can become poor too--when we open our hearts, make ourselves available to caring about others, and in the sharing of the wealth we have. Happy are the poor.

Jen: Happy those who mourn. Happy those who mourn.

We don't like to be 'down' in our culture, do we? We think it's a sign of weakness when people cry at funerals. We are very strange creatures. Do you know that? But where did, how did we get here? That's really off. It's off. Grieving is something all human beings go through, and it is grieving that cleanses our vision. When we can't see or feel our own pain, we become numb.

When we can't see or feel the sufferings of others, we won't do anything about it, will we? Happy those who grieve.

Jen: Happy those who yield. Happy those who yield.

Yielding is for the strong--the strong who could exert force, or power or strength over others, but who refuse to do so. Yielding is for the strong. On the evening of the Last Supper, Jesus said, 'I could call down battalions of angels to defend and protect us.' But he doesn't. He takes up bread and nourishes us with life, with truth, with compassion. Conquest is the norm in our world. Communion is Jesus' response.

Jen: Happy those who hunger and thirst to see justice prevail. Happy those who hunger and thirst to see justice prevail.

Everything hinges on one word in this verse. In Hebrew, it's *Tzedek*. And in Hebrew, there is righteous justice, or just righteousness. It's one word. So righteous people are doing justice, and just people are doing righteousness. You see how in English we have broken those two--sometimes light years apart. *Tzedek*--they are the same, and Jesus encourages us to be as hungry for righteous justice as we are for food.

Jen: Happy those who practice mercy with others. Happy those who practice mercy with others.

It is mercy that makes life real, and makes life possible. There is no life without mercy for one another. It is not all about me, it's about we.

Jen: Happy those who are pure within. Happy those who are pure within.

The theme of being unclean is such a major theme, and not only in Jesus' life and teachings, but in his times and culture. We've shared in the past, that while the word initially strikes us as strange, we are as fanatical about unclean people today as they were in Jesus' day.

Immigrants, and refugees--why do they have to come here? That's, that's uncleanness. Let's separate out the wheat from the chaff!

'Where does uncleanness come from?', Jesus asks again and again and again. From within, from within each one of us. A clean heart. A clear heart gazes on God. It is not caught up in rituals, in externals, in attitudes, in the conduct and condemnation of others. It keeps its heart's focus on God.

Jesus shatters all the taboos. All the people we shouldn't be with, he hangs out with. He dines with them. He blesses them. He heals them, and he heals us too. He refuses to pay any attention to the separations we work so hard to create.

My God, don't we work hard at it? *Will we be successful by the end of this year? We finally separated everyone out.* And Jesus treats all that stuff like cobwebs. It just doesn't matter. In fact, Jesus loves to contaminate us with grace.

Jen: Happy those who bring peace to others. Happy those who bring peace to others.

This is the core of the calling for all of us. As Jesus reconciled Heaven and Earth? So we are called as the body of Christ to reconcile and restore--families, loved ones, community, beyond. That's why we've been called to the faith and into existence. Just don't forget that peacemakers pay a price.

Jen: Happy those who are punished for their virtue. Happy those who are punished for their virtue.

This might be the best translation ever...How many of you are good people? And after this verse, how many of you want to be good people?

We've been warned, isn't this brilliant? To practice that goodness from deep within, which makes your soul feel alive. You'll get punished for it. Wow. Wow, this is revealing how great the distortion, huh? This eating of the tree of Good and Evil. We know better, right? That's what that story's trying to tell us. Look out, look out. Don't pretend we've got it all together. It is so confounding that when we move toward, when we speak, when we act on the truth we get punished for it.

Mmm-mmm. What a lesson! At least Jesus is being honest with us. Nibbling that fruit from the Tree of Good and Evil (which we've all done, alright) leaves us in some ways incapacitated to even know what that truth is. 'Be prepared,' he is saying so clearly.

You know, it's the powers and principalities of this world that Paul is speaking to in that Corinthians passage today, which are the kind of source of this trouble. That is, the powers of the world want to present themselves as divine or sacred, and loyalty becomes the big thing, right? *'Your allegiance to me, unquestioningly.'*

And Paul is saying that is not good enough. We must be prepared to speak the truth with our lives. Facing ourselves is hard enough. Facing what's going on in the world is equally hard.

Once again... I think most of you have heard about, we've got anti-Semitic flyers on the Iron Horse Trail. Who felt compelled to do that? It might only be one person, but they have yanked up generations of hatred with just one flyer. And [they] feel they have to do that.

We are here to speak the truth and to act on the truth as best we can. And when we do, we shall be punished for our virtue. Jesus says, Rejoice, be happy, you've got good company in the prophets who lived before you. Or as the great Russian author, Dostoevsky, said, "Love can be a harsh and dreadful thing."

Be happy. Be happy. You're in good company. Be happy.

Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.