

Micah 6:1-8

Psalm 15

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

Blessings of Compassionate Hopefulness

1When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain;
and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.

2Then 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.

12Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In the heart of downtown eastern Berlin the protestant Berliner Cathedral has been renovated from its war destroyed state to show the resilience of the faith. It is a fascinating building and one could talk for hours on the various aspects of its unique architectural aspects - but one of the first things that one sees when you come in and look up is the Dom. From the official internet site it states, "The powerful and radiant effect of the magnificent, 70 meter high dome causes every visitor to pause in reverence on entering the Cathedral. Flooded with light, the dove represents the presence of the Holy Spirit. The dome mosaics portray the beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. Each of the famous dome mosaics is 39 square meters large and comprised of over 500,000 tiles in approximately 2000 different shades of color."

The Berlin Cathedral was, for me, a place of awe and confusion. There is a definite sense of power when you come in there. There are statues of political as well as religious figures throughout; and overlooking them all - the Beatitudes - these words that I just read. This church represents the most powerful denomination - the majority of believers in the area are protestant - in the capital of one of the most powerful countries in the European Union - and the dove of peace and the beatitudes hang overhead as a constant reminder of the realm of God in the midst of earthly power.

And what sort of realm of God do the Beatitudes foretell? And I use the word, 'foretell' on purpose because these 9 Blessings not only speak about the Blessings in the present - but give all the hearers promises of what is to come. That is probably why this part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount causes most people to pause and reflect in the midst of whatever they may be doing.

It takes some concentration to understand, because it seems so nonsensical. It seems that all those natural animal-human tendencies that we feel we must acquire to survive and thrive in our grown up world - all those tendencies that we believe we need to get ahead in the world - it seems they are the opposite of what we need to be blessed.

And besides all that - the attributes described in the Beatitudes are not comfortable feelings. No one wants to stay poor, mourning, weak, hungry, persecuted, reviled, for very long. It would seem to burn out the most saintly of humans, and yet, Jesus says they are blessed, consecrated, sacred, holy, sanctified, worthy of adoration, reverence, divinely or supremely favored; fortunate.

We must also not forget the beginning of the scriptures for today, because this is a clue as to how one can be blessed and not burnt out. "When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them." They were in a community. They realized that Jesus wasn't calling each and every one of them to become so blessed in each way, but was naming what was in the hearts of many and will be again. He was lifting up the sadness's, the frustrations the goals of those who felt called to sit and listen to him.

They weren't forced there - they gravitated to him, because they knew that there was something about him that was true. These people felt weak and scared of the world around them, and they received blessings of one who wasn't satisfied to let them feel small alone and scared. He made them feel noble and strong, which in their heart of hearts they knew was true - just as we do today.

For those who know Christ and the community he brings, we know that when we mourn, we will be comforted and that is a power that is immeasurable. It is the power of communion with those who feel the hole in the heart from the loss of a loved one. We all have experienced this and the hole is partially filled with the awareness shared.

The Beatitudes touch the insecurities of each of us. The "Poor in Spirit" part has been described in various places as those who are poor financially, and there are those who define it as being poor intellectually and emotionally. The latter is the darkest and most hidden of our insecurities - to be not smart enough or considered uncouth!

This reminds me of a quote my brother posted on Facebook from Red Green, "The main problem with being a hermit is that without a friend or a significant other, you have to find out you're an idiot the hard way."

Oddly enough, I thought that was also a good quote to describe congregational life - granted that there is the same love and commitment to each other that there are in other 'significant other' relationships. But the Beatitudes were said to a group who would be very significant to each other and to Jesus - his disciples and followers. They experienced the hope the loss the mourning the peacemaking, the persecution together and grew from the experience. They grew so much that their experience with Christ created a thriving movement which became a world religion.

This religion resonated with so many because Jesus was talking to real people meeting them where they are and blessing them with compassion and hope. Riches and power are not what is going to make us feel comforted of just or safe or righteous or blessed - compassion is. And that is what Jesus is sharing in his sermon on the mount and through his life - understanding and empowerment through compassion.

Theologian David Lose wrote about this. He said:

"But let's be clear - or at least pay attention to the fact that Matthew is quite clear - Jesus isn't set up conditions or terms but rather is just plain blessing people. All kinds of people. All kinds of down-and-out, extremely vulnerable, and at the bottom of the ladder people. Why? To proclaim that God regularly shows up in mercy and blessing just where you least expect God to be - with the poor rather than the rich, those who are mourning rather than celebrating, the meek and the peacemakers rather than the strong and victorious. This is not where citizens of the ancient world look for God and, quite frankly, it's not where citizens of our own world do either. If God shows up here, Jesus is saying, blessing the weak and the vulnerable, then God will be everywhere, showering all creation and its inhabitants with blessing."

May we all know that God is with us at all times and that in our honest experience of weaknesses find truth, strength, community and God's blessings of compassionate hopefulness. AMEN