

Sunday, January 29, 2017

Micah 6:1-8

I Corinthians 1: 18-31

Matthew 5:1-12

Walking With God

How long would you wait for a treat? A researcher set up an experiment to find out. He left a succession of 4 year olds alone in a room and they were sitting at the table. On the table was one marshmallow. The researcher told the children that they could eat the marshmallow when he left the room or they could wait until he returned. If they waited they would receive a second marshmallow. The children therefore had a choice- one marshmallow now or two marshmallows if they were patient. The researcher then left the room and then watched and recorded the children through a hidden window. The results? Some of the children ate the marshmallow as soon as the door shut. Some squirmed and fidgeted for a while, but eventually ate it after a couple of minutes. A few of the children, picked the marshmallow up, licked it, nibbled it just a bit but didn't eat the whole thing. And even fewer endured the wait until the experiment to return, so that they could savour a second marshmallow. Very few received a second treat by only waiting. This is also true for all of us. We do not like to wait for something good. Even if we know something better is coming, we don't like to wait. We don't even like to wait for our blessings from God. We want them now.

Jesus and his disciples had begun their travelling through Galilee where he was teaching in the synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria and people brought to him all who were ill and in need of healing. Large crowds followed him as they wanted to hear what he had to say for his teachings were different than what others had said. He was healing people of sickness and disease and he was preaching about the kingdom of God. Because the crowd was so large, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. Eventually the crowd quietened down and Jesus began to teach what is known as the Sermon on the Mount.

For the next few weeks we will be looking at what this sermon includes and what it meant for those sitting on a mountainside who heard it and what these words might mean for us 2000 years later.

The focus for today is what is known as the Beatitudes or blessings of Jesus. With these statements in the opening verses of this sermon, Jesus appears to turn the way of the world upside down. Those who first heard these words were grateful because the ones sitting on the side of the mountain had been persecuted and frightened by the powerful and tough leadership of the times. Jesus then offers these blessings, and brings them words of encouragement in challenging times.

These 8 statements begin with the word "Blessed or bless-ed" depending upon the expression be shared or syllable counting. Those who are blessed are happy, holy and in some ways there is a moment of reverence and connections to God. And who are the blessed of God?

Jesus states, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This first statement may be considered the key to all that follows. For those who belong to the kingdom of heaven know God, rely upon him, trust him to renew their strength and call on him to lead their lives so that they can grow in faith and be happy in God’s love.

And so when we reflect on the subsequent blessings we realize in a new way that God is the One who enables you to be happy because of various factors:

One cannot mourn without appreciating how insufficient you are to handle life alone.

One cannot be meek unless you know you need to be gentle to yourself.

One cannot yearn for righteous if you consider yourself to be righteous already.

One cannot be merciful without recognizing your own need for mercy.

One cannot be pure in heart if filled with self- pride.

One cannot be a peacemaker if you believe you are always right.

One cannot identify with Jesus when others react to you negatively for your actions.

One needs to be humble which means being poor in spirit—and willing to grow.

Jesus tells the crowd that you will be happy because if your life is already perfect what do you do each day? What do you strive to do every day? To be poor in spirit means that you can become rich but how you do this is not simple or will it come to you all at once. It is a challenge which lasts our whole life. This challenge may or may not be beautiful depending upon your willingness to share with others or your desire to draw closer to God, His Son Jesus and to experience the Holy Spirit in your life.

A part of this challenge is to see the world as God sees it today and to experience God’s love and offer this love to others. We are the hands and feet of God and we cannot simply just look at the crowd and say it is too big to reach. We need to look at one or two people whose lives can be changed by telling our story of faith, our story of when Jesus made a difference in your life.

When Jesus speaks these blessings, he does not describe the people we most think of as blessed. Jesus’ words have power. Jesus’ words promise blessing for the future, but that future stretches back to the present. We have to wait because Jesus’ blessings will not be fully realized until the kingdom of heaven comes in its fullest. Yet in the meantime, what God offers to us will transform our understanding of the present. These blessings will sustain and comfort us. These blessings also lead us to do what God requires of us.

And what does God require of us? According to the prophet Micah God has shown us that we are to act justly, love mercy and to walk humbly with God. If we meet these requirements we will be and are blessed here on earth and in God’s promised kingdom of heaven.

This portion of the Sermon on the Mount are Jesus’ blessings and are often misunderstood. They are not attitudes that will make us happy. They are ways of walking with God which will result in our becoming happy or content in learning and knowing God. They are

ways of growing in faith and relationship with God and each other. By stating these blessings, Jesus shares his love for people, sometimes in situations way beyond their control.

How does one interpret these blessings when it seems the opposite is deemed true? These blessings are can make us happy in this life not for the short term, but throughout our life on earth. These blessings are what we each seek as we walk and in how we interact with others who share this walk with us. These blessings are slow to process yet when we receive them our spirits will soar.

Several years ago a panel of doctors was appointed by the federal government to meet together and draw of laws of public health that could be printed in pamphlet form and distributed to the public. After 12 days of exhaustive meetings there did not seem to be any form of consensus. It seems that their areas of concern were so diverse that they all approached the problem from their own disciplines. These doctors—specialists in their own way—cancer, cardiology, psychiatry, etc. The thoracic doctor was concerned about coal dust and lint from mines and textile mills, psychiatrist was concerned about urban stress. Finally one doctor (Harold Sladen of Detroit) came up with an appropriate idea. Let's just use the 8 beatitudes of Jesus and replace the word "Blessed" with the word 'healthy'.

Blessed, happy and healthy are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Let us rejoice and be glad for we are walking with God as we seek his blessings and live out our life in faithful service to Jesus Christ. Amen.

SING "Blest are they" 896 Vu