

Reflecting On The Beatitudes
Matthew 5: 1-11

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Blessed are the poor in spirit.

At the end our rope.

Relying till now on our own resources, we realize our own resources are insufficient for meeting the challenge we're facing, whatever it is life's demanding of us.

On our own, we don't have the strength of will, courage of heart, or wisdom we need to face harsh, painful reality.

We feel weak, tired and depleted, in body and soul. We lack the energy, the wherewithal, the spirit, to hang in there, to keep pushing that boulder, pulling that plow, in the unrelenting daily grind.

What we have, by ourselves, on our own, isn't enough.

And we're at the end of our rope. We're poor in spirit.

That's a tough place to be.

A crisis, with danger and opportunity.

The danger is that we give up, give in. The harsh reality or the daily grind overwhelms us like a wave and pulls us into a sea of despair, helplessness, and hopelessness.

But it's also an opportunity, an opportune time, to call out to God—whoever or however we conceive God to be.

We don't give up, we open up, to God—give me strength, give me courage, give me wisdom, because on my own, mine's not enough. Be with me, as strength, as courage, as wisdom, in my time of trial.

Breathe on me, breath of God. Place your hand on my heart. Be my light.

And however it is we experience God in our life, we open ourselves to the possibility of experiencing the inner strength, the courage of heart, the wisdom we need to face the harshness, to feel the pain, to persevere.

We open ourselves to the possibility of experiencing *God with us* for ourselves.

And once we actually experience *God with us* for ourselves, in our own lives, we're never the same again.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn.

For what, for who, do you mourn?

What's happening in your life, or the life of a loved one, or a friend or acquaintance, or someone half-a-world away, that's breaking your heart, making you sad, making you cry?

What's happening in your home, your neighborhood, your city, your country, your planet?

For what, for who, do you mourn?

What have you lost, what are you losing?

Who have you lost, who are you losing?

Health? Mobility? Memory? Ability?
Familiar surroundings, familiar routines, familiar people?
Stability? Security?
A soul mate, a best friend, a good neighbor?
A tree, a field, another species?
What loss are you mourning?

Losing who we love, what we love, is part of life. We mourn who and what we lose.
The more we love, the more we lose, the more we mourn.
Those who love much, mourn much.
That's true—those who love much, mourn much—but it's not the only truth.
Loss is part of life. But life is unfair, which means loss is unfair, which means mourning is unfair.

Some people, because of where they live or who they are—their life circumstances—lose far more than others, far more often, and more unfairly. Which means they unfairly mourn more than others. They bear an unfair burden of mourning.

Do we mourn for them—the people on this earth who experience life as a veil of tears because they're losing, or have lost, all they love?

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek.

Meek.

A quality. An energy. A presence.

A way of being in this world.

A way of relating to other people.

A way of walking on this earth.

Gently. With care. With sensitivity.

Not aggressively. Not carelessly. Not senselessly.

Meek.

An ability to approach others, and approachable by others.

A sensitivity towards others—other's energy, other's presence.

A sensitivity to, and appreciation for, other's needs.

A sensitivity to, and appreciation for, the effect one has on others, the impact one's life has on others.

A sensitivity to, and appreciation for, one's relationship to the communities in which one lives, the ecosystems in which one lives. And one's responsibility to those communities and ecosystems.

Meek.

Gentle, careful, sensitive.

Being meek doesn't mean being a pushover, it means not pushing others over.

Being meek doesn't mean letting others step on you, it means not stepping on others.

Being meek doesn't mean being weak, it means not preying on the weakness of others.

Meek.

Humble. Non-hierarchical. Egalitarian.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

What's the hungriest you've ever been? Have you ever gone days without food, have you ever been truly famished, weak with hunger, aching for food?

What's the thirstiest you've ever been? Have you ever suffered dehydration, felt your dried-out body painfully cramp, see your vision blur, feel dizzy?

To hunger and thirst.

Not to just be hungry, but to *hunger* with all your body. Food is all you think about.

Not to just be thirsty, but to *thirst* with all your body. Water is all you think about.

Who really *hungers*, who really *thirsts*, in pain, in desperation, for what's right?

Those suffering from wrong.

Those to whom something wrong is being done.

Those whose lives—whose bodies, minds, hearts, spirits—are being violated, abused, hurt by others.

Those on the losing end of injustice, prejudice, oppression, exploitation.

Those being treated as less-than-human by other humans.

People being wronged hunger and thirst for what's right.

Ache for what's right, with their whole body.

Ache for the wrong to stop, ache for their lives to be made right.

That's all they think about.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful.

Mercy.

A deep appreciation for the human condition.

A deep appreciation for human imperfection.

A deep appreciation for who people are, and why they are the way they are—why people see what they see, hear what they hear, think what they think, feel what they feel, do what they do, act the way they act, behave the way they behave.

A deep appreciation for the way life circumstances shape people—everything from one's genes, bio-chemistry and physiology, to the color of one's skin, one's gender, one's sexual orientation, the family, neighborhood and country into which one is born, the class into which one is born.

No one gets to choose that stuff before they're born, yet all that stuff dramatically shapes people's lives after their born.

For some people, all those life circumstances mean they're likely to be sitting in here on a pew on Sunday morning. For other people, it means they're more likely to be sitting outside on the sidewalk every morning.

Mercy.

A deep appreciation for those inside, and for what each one of us thinks and feels about those outside, and how we each act toward them.

A deep appreciation for those outside, and for what they think and feel about us, and how each one of them acts toward us.

Mercy.

Deciding not to punish someone for the wrong they've done, the harm they've done.

Out of a deep appreciation for the human condition, and with a heart that loves wholeheartedly, you decide not to punish someone.

You may hold another accountable for what they've done, seek some form of restorative justice. But not punitive justice. You don't punish people.

Mercy.

Out of a deep appreciation for human imperfection, you give another person a break, another chance, an opportunity to make things right, a new lease on life.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart.

Pure.

Uncontaminated.

A heart uncontaminated by self-absorption—me, me, me.

A heart uncontaminated by desire—desire for pleasure, for status, for possessions.

A heart uncontaminated by envy—always comparing myself to others, always desiring what others have, always despising those who have what I can't have.

A heart uncontaminated by lies—lies about one's self, lies about others, lies about reality.

Pure.

Whole.

Pure in heart means whole-hearted, not half-hearted.

Full strength, not diluted.

Love God with all your heart, Jesus said, not part of your heart.

All the time, not half the time.

A person who loves whole-heartedly, with a wholly uncontaminated heart, is a holy person.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

People have conflicts with other people. That's part of life on this earth as we know it.

Wherever self-interest is involved, conflict can arise. One person's self-interest conflicts with another person's self-interest.

Conflicting self-interests create friction. Friction creates heat. Heat can escalate a conflict into a war.

Some people seem more conflict prone.

Maybe their self-interest is strong.

Maybe they create lots of friction in their relationships, they have lots of heated exchanges that turn into fights and escalate into wars.

Some people are born into cycles of conflict, with generations of enemies fighting continuously for the upper hand, and avenging every loss.

Some conflict can't be avoided. Some conflicts shouldn't be avoided.

Jesus came into conflict with his society. Again to paraphrase Barth, Jesus contradicted his society in a way filled with promise. Jesus had enemies.

When Jesus said, love your enemy, it's because he had enemies, people with whom we was in conflict. And he knew that anyone who followed him, who lived as he lived, would come into conflict with their society and have enemies.

Conflict is part of life. Our interests will conflict with other people's interests.

If we follow Christ, we have enemies.

How shall we treat our enemies?

How shall we seek peace in the midst of conflict?
Love, Jesus said. Whole-hearted love, not half-hearted love.
Peace-making, in the midst of conflict, requires whole-hearted love for the one with whom you're in conflict. And sometimes, mercy.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who're persecuted for being like Jesus.
Those whom others ridicule, mock, hate, punish, because they envision the world Jesus envisioned, live the way Jesus lived, relate to others the way Jesus related to others, teach what Jesus taught, resist what Jesus resisted, try to change what Jesus tried to change.

Blessed are those who're persecuted for being like Jesus.
Those who contradict society.
Contradict their family, their friends, their boss.
Contradict their government.
Contradict the dominant view of reality.
In Christ-like ways, in visible ways, in real tangible ways, and for doing so are scorned, abused, ostracized, crucified by others.

Blessed are those who're persecuted for being like Jesus.
Those who're persecuted because, like Jesus, they mourn, they're meek, they're righteous, their merciful, they love whole-heartedly, they're peace-makers.
Blessed are those who're persecuted for being like Jesus, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.