

Reflection on the Beatitudes (cont'd) – Feb. 6, 2011

Scripture: Matthew 5: 1-20

We continue our reflection on the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ this morning, picking up where we left off last Sunday. We covered the first four of the Beatitudes which describe the heart of the person who is in right relationship to God. We talked about those who are poor in spirit, those who mourn, those who are meek, and those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. We talked about how Jesus uses a teaching technique called “the great reversal” to surprise us into seeing something we hadn’t seen so clearly before.

This morning we will reflect on each of the four remaining Beatitudes, which deal with how the person who **is** in right relationship to God relates to other people. As we did last week, I will enlarge on each one – re-read it – and then we will have a quiet moment of reflection.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

At first blush this is pretty straightforward. The language hasn’t changed over time, and we know what it means. What we may miss is the higher spiritual meaning which is also included here. Not only are we required to **act** merciful – but we are required to **think** and **feel** merciful. An act of mercy which is performed only out of duty, or is accompanied by thoughts of judgment or other unkind thoughts is hypocrisy. Dishonest acts of mercy bless neither the giver nor the recipient. The higher spiritual reality is that each of us is part of the living garment of God – and we will each of us reap the results of the treatment we give to others. Because we are merciful to those who

falter along the path, we can expect mercy when we need help from those who are further along the path than we are. It is also manifestly true that if we free ourselves from judging others, we will reduce or eliminate the burden of guilt and self-condemnation that we might otherwise carry.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

(reflection)

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

This is a huge one! They shall see **God!** Does this mean literally to physically **see** God? No – I don't think so. We know that God is a spiritual reality – not a physical being. To see God in a physical form would limit God – and we know that God is beyond our human limitations.

So our “seeing” here is not physical seeing – it is spiritual perception – an ability to understand or “know” God in a way that most of us would have to admit we are not able to do.

Our New Creed says: “We live in God’s world.” This means that heaven – which is another word for God’s kingdom – is all around us. We are living in it right now – where else could we be? But we are used to thinking only in three dimensions. If heaven is God’s kingdom – or God’s presence (since we know that God is everywhere) – then heaven is infinite, heaven is eternity, heaven is the **spiritual** realm – different from but including what we can perceive with our senses. In the spiritual realm there is no time, no space, no death and no decay.

In our three dimensional world, we see the progression of time. We see birth, death and decay. We know mortality. It's like being in a beautiful garden but not being able to see beautiful colours or smell the fragrance of a rose. Our sensory world limits us to what we can normally perceive or understand. We have "fallen" into three dimensional reality. We must become spiritual beings in order to "see" God – in order to perceive the spiritual realm as it really is – in order to experience the presence of God.

But who shall "see" God? This Beatitude tells us that the pure in heart shall see God. Purity is often understood to mean physical or moral purity, and certainly that is the foundation of this concept. But spiritually it means much more. The pure in heart recognize that God and God alone is the only **real** Cause and the only **real** Power in existence. God is the only Presence in our spiritual lives, and when we are pure in heart, we not only know this in our heads (intellectually) but we make it real – we take that understanding into every nook and cranny of our lives. When we are pure in heart we hold nothing back from God, and we strive to bring our own will into perfect harmony with God's will. When this is accomplished, we move into the eternal Presence of God, and beyond all limitations of time, space and physical matter.

Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

(reflection)

Blessed are the peace makers: for they shall be called the children of God.

When, and as we become pure in heart we will be in communion with God – and communion with God we call **prayer**. In prayer, we experience God’s presence and that is a life-altering experience. Every time we pray we are intentionally opening ourselves to commune with God, and every time, sometimes incrementally, sometimes in huge conversion experiences, we are changed. We begin to experience serenity – and serenity is the **peace** of God. As we experience serenity, or peace of mind, we become capable of true concentration, and our prayers become ever more effective and powerful. Thus we become truly children of God – growing in the image of the Creator.

To be a peace-maker in the usual understanding of the words is a difficult and often ineffective process. Interfering in the conflicts of others is not usually appreciated or rewarded with success. But the powerful prayer of a person who is pure in heart and who has experienced and embodies the peace of God, can bring about resolution. How? By bringing the influence of God’s Word to bear on the situation for the highest good of the parties involved.

Blessed are the peace-makers: for they shall be called the children of God.

(reflection)

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

If we take this literally, at face value, then it is pretty startling, and even scary. It is also correct. We know that even today Christians all over the world are being persecuted and even killed for their beliefs. Others who are actively pursuing that which is right are also persecuted and often tortured and killed, are they not?

But remembering that we are dealing with the spiritual, not the physical realm here, what does Jesus really mean? What is the true source of the persecution we all experience, even the saints who have gone before us? The true source, friends, is ourselves – no outside persecutor but our own lower selves. When we struggle to do what is right even when we want to do something else, when we wrestle with our own hatred, our own anger, our own lust, when we know we are not being righteous, then we are blessed by the struggle. We are blessed for our thoughts of righteousness, blessed by this persecution from our lower selves because **the triumph** of our thoughts and acts of righteousness will be rewarded in God's kingdom – in the spiritual realm.

Jesus himself was persecuted or tempted in this way, both in the desert, and in the garden at Gethsemane. Please notice that Jesus at no time blamed anyone else for the circumstances or difficulties of his life. He did what he came to do. He struggled internally with his persecutor, and he called on a Higher Power – God – his Father, for help when he needed it.

When we are having difficulties in our lives, when we are feeling tempted or persecuted, we must follow the way of Jesus. We must apply what we have learned about righteous living, and call on our God for help in prayer when we feel that we are losing the battle. If we find

ourselves blaming others, projecting our problems outside ourselves in some way, then the spiritual path requires correction. Our persecutor is within – our own lower selves that must be transformed.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

(reflection)

Our reflections on the Beatitudes of Jesus brings us to today's reading from Matthew 5 which follows right after. "Ye are the salt of the earth...Ye are the light of the world...Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Jesus is talking about those who have understood the teachings of the Beatitudes and have reached some level of spiritual understanding of the true nature of being. He is talking about those who understand the Allness of God or Good, and the powerlessness of evil in the face of the Truth. The calmness or serenity that knowledge brings to us is to be shared with others. Let your light shine, people of God. And rejoice, for great is your reward in the spiritual realm of heaven right here on earth!