

"Happy People"
November 4, 2018

Matthew 5:1-12

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Call to Worship

Happy are those who come seeking God's wisdom and looking to Jesus who alone can give a right perspective for life. **For he has revealed a vision of a new reality, and opened to us a new way of seeing.**

Happy are those who look from Jesus' viewpoint, a total reversal from the viewpoint of the world.

We will look where he points, and we will trust in him who gives us sightings of God's realm of simplicity, hope and compassion.

Let us worship God whose grace draws us here and who enlightens our eyes.

Prayer of Invocation

Lord, Open us to all that you would have us be, for you and for others.

'Breakthrough' into our lives and our church with new possibilities. Amen.

The Word

Matthew 5:1-12

Common English Bible

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. He taught them, saying: "Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

"Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad. "Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.

"Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full. "Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy.

"Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God.

"Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God's children.

"Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. **"Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.**

Living the Word

PRAY

It took me a while to understand why the Beatitudes are listed for today's scripture in the lectionary. They are great texts to be preached, but 'happy people' at first didn't feel right as we come to celebrate All Saints' Day, and the loved ones we have lost.

I wrestled with the happy people versus the blessed people. That could probably be a sermon all to itself...those who are blessed because of their lifestyle, versus those who feel happy because they are blessed. Yet maybe I am just splitting hairs and that issue is more about my not wanting to let go of the words I learned in the beatitude for a more up dated version. Still I was stuck with 'happy people' on All Saints' Day. The beginnings of this occasion, was set as a celebration to honor all the saints, known and unknown. We do not honor them because they have died. That we grieve. We all grieve differently and so there is some of that feeling in this celebration, too.

But when we think of them, we don't think of who they might be today, but who they were for us in their lives. For what of them that has made us who we are, for all that they lived for and all that they were. We celebrate the saints not because of who they became in death, but because of who they were here on earth. Then I can see the happy parts for us in this celebration. The happy for them is that they live on in a much better place than here. Charles Cook, Professor Emeritus at Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, Texas writes this: "Whenever we hear [Matthew 5:1-12] the Beatitudes, we are struck with their poetic beauty and, at the same time, overwhelmed by their perceived impracticality for the world in which we live."

In today's society it seems as if the blessings go to those who earn it and the poor are left without. No one really wants to be hopeless, humble, grieving, insulted or harassed. Those kind of things don't seem to help anyone get ahead in this competitive climate. Often when the Beatitudes are referred to it is connected with Jesus trying to turn the world upside down.

The answer is in the practicality, not impracticality. They seem like a huge challenge for our daily living. It must take great saints to live like that. So we wait for people like Martin Luther King and Desmond Tutu to be an example of a life we think that we cannot also accomplish. While we sit back and wait for the next Saint to surface, the world doesn't get any better and we never get past a small portion of our potential to change the world as Christians.

In truth the Beatitudes that Jesus has given is for all of us, not just a few. We are all called to live into the spirit of being saints. To do that it helps if we take them as a whole rather than a piece at a time. They are all related to each other and even build on each other. If you are hopeless, you may become more humble, which can lead to thirsting for righteousness. When you are harassed you may become hopeless, and then show mercy to others.

This all paints a dim picture, but within it all comes three principles for living in the spirit of the Beatitudes: simplicity, hopefulness and compassion. Living in that way allows us to live in the world, but not of the world. Simplicity begins with hearing Christ's words as things to make life easier rather than words to complicate our lives. To hear these words as if they are spoken directly to us may make us brave enough to begin to live into them.

If Jesus said to you, 'You are happiest when you live humbly, when you bring peace to each situation, when you open your heart to others, and when there is someone crying for mercy, you respond and receive mercy by giving it to another.' When we begin to hear Jesus' word to us as a simple plan of God's desire for our happiness, we do turn the world on it's ear. Many have become cynical, only adding to the hopelessness of the world today; when we let go of the anger of injustice, to sit in acceptance through cynicism, then nothing changes. If we are willing to accept the way things are, especially when they seem hopeless, then no one is left to hope and help any kind of change happen.

The Beatitudes remind us that Jesus is the hope for the hopeless. Once reminded we can be a part of bringing that hope to the hopeless, with the knowledge that a day of peace and mercy and love will come if we each do our part. The third principle of living into the Beatitudes is compassion. The late Henry Nouwen describes compassion in this way: "it grows with the inner recognition that your neighbor shares your humanity with you. This partnership cuts through all walls which might have kept you separate."

Across all barriers of land and language, wealth and poverty, knowledge and ignorance, we are one, created from the same dust, subject to the same laws, destined for the same end." We are each unique, but more importantly we were all created in God's image; so we belong to one another as family. We can all live into the spirit of the Beatitudes with a dedication to simplicity, hopefulness and compassion. In the process we could find that rather than impractical, we would find it very practical living which can lead to happiness or blessings.

Those we honor today are the saints of our lives. They are the ones who gave us the guiding principles that make our lives easier to live. They taught us in classrooms, through their life styles and by their very being. That is why they are easy to celebrate and recall. Yet, what if you have people who were in your life that you would not consider a saint? Someone whose mark on your life wasn't positive? There can be a blessing that may begin for you in remembering them today as well. It is also All Souls' Day which is a day of prayer for the dead, particularly but not exclusively, one's relatives.

In Western Christianity the annual All Souls' Day celebration is now held on November 2 and is associated with All Saints' Day (November 1) and its eve, Halloween (October 31). In parts of the Catholic Church it is called The Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, and is celebrated annually on November 2, even if this date falls on a Sunday.

Prayer for the dead is a documented practice in Judaism and in early Christianity. The setting aside of a particular day for praying not just for certain named individuals but for whole classes of the departed or for the dead in general was well established by the end of the first millennium. At the Reformation the celebration of All Souls' Day was fused with All Saints' Day in the Church of England. In the Methodist Church, saints refer to *all* Christians and therefore, on All Saints' Day, the Church Universal, as well as the deceased members of a local congregation are honored and remembered.

I am sure you heard me say that some call it the commemoration of all faithfully departed. You may have some souls who touched your life that weren't saints and you wouldn't even consider them as one of the faithfully departed. Even thoughts of them after they were gone may dredge up painful memories. But here is the happy part again: you have the choice to pray for their soul even if they hurt you. It could be a sign of your forgiveness of them. When you forgive someone alive or dead, who has hurt you, you begin to let go of the pain. They can no longer hurt you in this life, unless you let the old hurts continue to fester.

God would wish for us to be happy in our lives, partially to bring happiness to others. We make the choices of what we will focus our lives on, past joys and happiness or bitterness toward someone who is now gone. We also need to be regularly reminded of the blessings and happiness that God has offered us.

I was reminded this week of the Mar Elias School, "promoting justice and peace within." Each day the students can read the Beatitudes on the steps as they climb them to enter the school. They are written for all eyes as there on written in English, Arabic & Muslim. We choose what we will take in of our surroundings, including the Bible, which can be our book of life.

Today may we be reminded of those we love that are gone, but also those we may still need to forgive. Christ died so we could forgive and be forgiven...In the communion meal, we remember Christ and know that we can leave all of our pain of grief and hurts at the cross.