

“Blessedness Revised”
Matthew 5: 1-12
Rev. David J. Wood
September 7, 2025

Matthew 5: 1-12

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he began to teach them, saying:

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

“Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

“Blessed are the meek,
for they shall inherit the earth.

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they shall be satisfied.

“Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall receive mercy.

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

“Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called children of God.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

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

I often have the experience, as I’m sure many of you do, of hearing a piece of music and being transported back to another place and time.

I have an experience like this when I read the BEATITUDES. Just reading them takes me back to a moment on a trip I to Israel back in 2013 with a group from the congregation where I was serving at the time.

We visited the Church of the Beatitudes. I remember being gathered off to the side of the Church in a small garden area...

Off to our right, beyond a fence was a sloping hillside with long wild grass and flowers sloping down into the sea of Galilee...It was the area we know where Jesus walked.

As we were gathered there, someone suggested that we read aloud the beatitudes...as I read my portion...i was surprised by the emotion that welled up in me...

Like never before...I felt how these words must have been first heard. I could imagine the faces, I could even imagine the clothing...it would have been a motley crew...not the typical crew found in a temple or synagogue of the day...

I could easily imagine there were many, probably the majority of the crowd, who bore the marks of being scarred by life...the over-ruled, the over-ridden, and the over-looked.

The ones used to being regarded as the outcast, the downcast, the ones who were cast aside...

And then he spoke these words...
words of blessedness that must have STARTLED them...
words that they had never heard addressed to them
to their circumstance in life...

I don't think it was a prepared speech...
but one born in that moment of interaction...
inspired by a love too deep for words.

Blessed are you...who are poor, who mourn, who are meek, who hunger and thirst...kingdom of heaven belongs to *you*, *you* will be comforted, *you* will inherit the earth, *you* will be filled...

And *you*...
you who feel your lack of righteousness,
you who suffer injustice...
you who know what it's like to be judged by the self righteous and treated unmercifully...
you who are dismissed because you don't pass the purity test, you who are makers of peace...
even you who suffer for doing what is right...*you* are God's children, *you* will know mercy, *you* will see God..*yours* is the Kingdom of heaven.

Startling words indeed.

David Brooks in an essay about what he considers a moment of conversion...when his life was turned around...his heart was awakened to God..

Look at the inverse logic in those verses.

*Most of the time we go through life governed by a straightforward logic:
Practice makes perfect,
effort leads to reward,
winners get admired.
But here was a moral logic radically at odds with that:
The meek shall be exalted,
blessed are the poor in spirit,
blessed are those who hunger and thirst,
where there is humility there is majesty,
where there is weakness there is might.*

*This logic struck me as both startling, revolutionary and astonishingly beautiful.
I had the feeling I had glimpsed a goodness more radical than anything I had ever imagined,
a moral grandeur far vaster and truer than anything that could have emerged from our prosaic world.*

If our “prosaic world” as Brooks puts it, the blessed life becomes identified with what we need to acquire, achieve, attain...can lead to a devaluation of my life as it is...

Too easily we become stitched into a narrative of value and valuation that contradicts these affirmations of Jesus.

Without realizing it, certain impulses to action get devalued, tamped down and worked out of us:

Meekness seems pointless and insufficient...

in the face of the exercise of ruthless power against the powerless...Rather than taste my hunger and thirst for what is true, good, and beautiful – I reach for the quick fix that masks that hunger and bloats my soul.

My aspiration for peace, to be merciful, to go gently...gives way to attitudes and dispositions that promise quicker results and greater impact...and more immediate, measurable reward...the longings of my heart get lost amidst superficial distractions – my heart gets divided...and my sense of life in its depths is lost...

God’s presence in the world escapes my recognition...I no longer see God...even more, I no longer believe God sees me.

All in all, an essential simplicity is lost...in pursuit of a good life, our lives has become cluttered, distracted, shallow, withdrawn, and anxious, and fearful.

Like many of you, I suspect, I need to hear a word that breaks through all my flailing and hear again these words of grace: *you are blessed*. You are fortunate...you belong to God...and let my life, my everyday, once again be oriented to and by that affirmation...by that recognition.

If they are to ring true in and for this world, it is because there exists a people who see these words as true not just for themselves...but for the world. A people who, by faith, are learning to see the world through God's eyes....

If the poor in spirit are to know themselves to be blessed
If the humble, the grieving, the downtrodden, the overlooked, the downcast, those who feel unworthy, who suffer for doing what is right regardless of the cost...if such people are to know their lives as blessed...then there must be a place and a people capable of making God's blessedness plausible...there must be a place where people learn to see their lives and this world from God's point of view.....and are raised up because of it.

This week, a woman who has suffered from an accident that left her unable to meet her rent and then her septic tank failed...after exhausting all possibilities, a agency reached out to us...this week she will receive a gift from this congregation to tide her over...in that moment, in the midst of her desperation, she will feel remembered, cared for..I dare say, in that moment she will feel blessed...

Someone wrote to say that they know this congregation because of how they cared for his mother in her time of great physical need and keep company with her in the last months of her life...

If we are to receive these words as true for ourselves...then we must be a place where those who would otherwise feel overlooked, dismissed, deserted, and alone...are received, embraced, cared for, and restored...

If we are to received these words as true for ourselves...then we must be a place where people who feel their efforts, their love for what is good, and true and beautiful are encouraged, and strengthened, and empowered...and raised up.

By God's grace...in times such as those we are living through...may we be such a place and such a people...Amen.