

**“Blessed are the Meek”**  
**Matthew 5: 5**  
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**Philippians 2: 1-11**

If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.

Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a human, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.

Therefore God exalted him even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name, so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Matthew 11:28-30**

[Jesus said:] “Come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

**Matthew 5:5**

[And Jesus said:] Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

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Earlier this week, Jennifer were driving somewhere and she asked what I was preaching this Sunday.

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

She said, “I think this is a really difficult beatitude...perhaps the most difficult.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “it is a hard one for people to accept and embrace.”

“No, I mean this is really difficult for *you!*”

Guilty as charged!

So what does it mean to be meek? It is a faulty view of meekness to conceive of it as a personality trait (one who tends to be unassuming, mild gentle, unable to take initiative) and thus limited to those who possess it by nature.

I find it helpful to name what I think is the opposite of meekness....  
I would name that as a posture of AGGRESSIVENESS.

One reason we don't deal well with meekness...is that there is much in our way of life that cultivates an aggressive disposition in our relationship with the world. There is a way of being in the world that tilts us towards aggression. It's subtle and it is akin to the dispositional water we swim in.

In the course of our everyday lives, regardless of age or physical capacity, or natural bent, we become accustomed to the exercise of regardless power. With the turn of a key or a dial, the stroke of a keyboard, the click of a mouse, or the touch of our fingertips on a screen, we are able to summon up whatever our heart desires...at any time from anywhere...without regard to our skill or strength.

Become accustomed to pressing the world into service, bending it to our purposes. Without realizing it, we can adopt an instrumental vs. a reverential relationship to the world.

As a result the world ceases to speak to us...we ceased to be moved by it in any meaningful way. We no longer feel touched by the world...To busy moving through it to be moved by it.

Perhaps we come close to the experience of the meek...When have those moments when we are exposed to how little control we actually have...in this life...

Illness...death of a loved one...the loss of a job...feeling overwhelmed by the state of the world around us or within us...  
our own physical state...or feeling that the world is passing by.

Any number of circumstances that can place us among the meek...less about our natural personality traits...and more about our encounter with the reality of our humanity...and the experience of finding God in midst of that encounter.

Something about the disposition of meekness that situates us in the world more truthfully...it speaks of a posture of openness, of vulnerability, of receptivity, and of responsiveness to the presence of God.

I found myself searching for an image that exemplified meekness that encompassed the posture of meekness I think it contained in Jesus's teaching.

The apt image of the meek is not that of a shrinking violet but of a blossoming rose.

One that immediately came to mind was Rosa Parks...became known for her pivotal role in the earliest days of the Civil Rights Movement. All because of that day in Montgomery, Alabama in 1955, when she boarded a bus, took her seat and refused to give it up when commanded to do so in order to make room for a white passenger.

Her humble defiance sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott...that helped bring an end to racial segregation on public transportation. When Rosa Parks sat down, it was as if a whole people stood up...and in time the world was changed...and is still changing.

For the Christian, any concept of meekness has to take its measure and meaning from the life of Christ. In our reading from Matthew, Jesus identifies himself with the meek and lowly. He identifies with any and all who feel wearied and burdened by this world.

That same disposition, approachability, is what is to characterize our way of being with one another....becomes a pattern for our own lives.

In our reading from Philippians, the Apostle Paul admonishes his readers to:

*Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit,  
but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.  
Let each of you look not to your own interests  
but to the interests of others.*

The model of this disposition, this way of being in the world, is Christ Jesus whose divinity was on full display when he humbled himself and took on human form...not in a superficial way...but to the extent of suffering death on a cross. Meekness so understood speaks of a Godlikeness that is essential to the salvation of the world.

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

It is tempting to feel that this praise of meekness is out of sync...inadequate to the moment we are living through when the raw even capricious exercise of power seems so effective and consequential... and so firmly in control.

But even now, in the midst of these troubling times, we know that posture of hostility, violence, defensiveness, resentment, and despair are not what will make right the wrongs that seem so strong in our world.

Here in this company of faith, we are learning to be guided by a conviction that there is a way of life that leads to life that is from the very heart of God...and it is sufficient to meet whatever moment of struggle we may face in this life.

One way of naming that way of life is meekness. It speaks of a strength and power that cannot be finally overcome or defeated.

The way of nonviolence is surely a central to any definition of meekness. Martin Luther King proclaimed, "True nonviolence is not unrealistic submission to evil power...it is rather a courageous confrontation with evil by the power of love."

*Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.*

So we are left to grapple together with what it means for us in this time we share, in this life we share together in the life of this congregation to be found among the meek...and to find in that meekness the blessedness that God in Christ makes possible.

There is another character in the pantheon of saints I have collected over the years that came to mind as I contemplated the meaning of meekness: Albert Schweitzer.

By age 30 he had 4 degrees including one PhD...he was a professor of a university, a theologian, a world renowned organist, an authority on the music of Bach. It was then that he committed the rest of his life to serving humanity...to serve the sick and the poor. At an early age he had become stricken by the history of oppression his fellow Europeans had brought upon the people of Africa. He committed his life to, as he put it, "make atonement for our crimes against the people of Africa."

He went back to school and earned his medical degree, became a surgeon and at age 40 he set sail for French Equatorial Africa in the territory of Gabon...where he, along with his wife, would establish a hospital at the village of Lambarene. When they arrived there were no buildings – except for a chicken coup where they set up their first clinic. There was no electricity, no running water. It was 1914.

In time, through two world wars and all the tumult of those years, by the 1960's the hospital he built would be comprised of 72 buildings and serve more than 7k patients a year. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952. Albert Schweitzer died in 1965 at the age of 90. Today the Hospital Albert Schweitzer is made up of departments of internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics, a maternity clinic, a dentistry clinic and a medical research center that focuses on malaria.

He became widely known through his writings for his view that all ethics, all morality was dependent upon a reverence for life.

*I can do no other than be reverent before everything that is called life. I can do no other than to have compassion for all that is called life. That is the beginning and the foundation of all ethics.*

I cannot think of a more fullsome definition of the disposition of meekness.

Perhaps the best known book he wrote is his study of the life of Jesus: *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. In the closing words of that book, he concludes that Jesus is the one who...

*...comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lakeside, He came to those men who knew Him not. He speaks to us the same words: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey Him, whether they be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.*

Blessed are the Meek for  
they shall inherit the earth. Amen.