

SCRIPTURE..... Matthew 5:1-3

When Jesus^a saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

MESSAGE..... *The Poor In Spirit*Pastor Susan Boegli

So we begin our exploration of the Sermon on the Mount with what we call the Beatitudes. But before we get to the first of Jesus’ teachings, I just want to point out three things. First of all, different resources will tell you how many blessings there are. Some say eight, some say nine. Actually, there’s nine times Jesus says “Blessed are you...” but the eighth and ninth blessing is one thought. The eight blessing is “blessed are the persecuted,” and the ninth saying is “oh and by the way you (meaning the disciples) will be blessed because you will be persecuted. OK, so 8 blessings.

The second point is that this sermon was not given to the crowds. Often, we see paintings of Jesus preaching to thousands of people, but that’s not how Matthew describes what happened. Jesus saw the crowds and decided to get away from them by going up a mountain. His disciples soon followed him and they all sat together, sitting relaxed under a tree, learning the most profound secrets of life.

And third, the whole point of the entire sermon and what Jesus wants us to do, is to wean our hearts away from relying upon outer things, whether they be for pleasurable gratification or even for spiritual salvation, he wanted us to separate ourselves from these external ways and drum into us a whole new attitude of mind all together. This has to do with how we think. How we think about God, the world we live in, others and even ourselves.

And that’s when he begins his teachings and he begins with the Beatitudes. As many of you know, the Beatitudes are simply a list of who is blessed. Sometimes you’ll hear translations of this text to read “happy are those...” instead of “blessed are those.” That’s a mistake, because Jesus wasn’t sharing with his disciples how one lives a happy life. A happy life is very different from a blessed life. As Laurie Leslie shared with you when I was gone a few months ago, there’s a difference between happiness and joy. Being blessed is to experience joy. Happiness comes from things outside of ourselves – a new car, a great job, a fabulous spouse, etc.. We lose our happiness when external good things go away.

But joy is a gift only from God and when we have it, it is something that wells up within. It is the feeling of being connected to the Divine. This connection can happen in any and all circumstances. So, whether you’ve just won the lottery or lost someone you love, it’s possible to know God’s blessing, it’s possible to feel the connection between you and God. And if you’ve ever experienced this kind of blessing, this connection, you’ll know that there is no greater feeling in the world.

So, the Beatitudes are a list of when, not how, but when we might experience that Divine connection that offers pure joy. And it’s counter to everything we would logically imagine. He starts off with “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God.” Let’s first look at “kingdom of God.” The kingdom of God is not heaven after we die, it is being of the same mind as God. It is seeing the world with God’s eyes. It is living in this world in the way that God intended for us to live, which is living in connection with Him. So when might we see the world as God sees the world? When we are poor in spirit.

There are a hundred thousand interpretations of what “poor in spirit” actually means, but Emmet Fox, the author we’re studying this summer, offers an explanation that makes a whole lot of sense. He suggests that “poor in spirit” refers to a kind of emptying. The “poor in spirit” are not full of pre-conceived ideas, confidence in our own judgements, filled with any kind of spiritual pride or academic distinction. They are free from all of that. If they are empty, they have room for experiencing the Truth about God. Emmet Fox uses the story of the rich young man who ends up turning away from Jesus because he has possessions. Possessions doesn’t necessarily mean things, but more likely those pre-conceived ideas, or confidence in his own judgement, or his own spiritual pride and academic distinction. That’s a good illustration of someone who is NOT “poor in spirit,” but I have another example.

In seminary, a large number of people, both young and old, drop out after the first year because they are not “poor in spirit.” Many folks who feel the call from God to go into the ministry do so because they feel that they have the answers and it would be the right thing to do to share those answers. They go to seminary with many pre-conceived ideas about Jesus. Ideas they learned from their own churches since they were children. They go to seminary with great confidence that they know what God wants of us. They go with a great deal of spiritual pride, feeling that they know Jesus in deeper ways than most of us, and so on.

What happens that first year of seminary is that all those pre-conceived theologies are challenged in ways that knock folks right off their soap box, and they leave chalking seminary up to an institution of misguided people (that’s the nice way to say it) who need to be saved. I didn’t have that particular problem because I never went to church as a child and rarely as an adult, so I had few ideas about God. That’s why I was there, to get some ideas.

Those of us who have space in our minds for God’s revelation, even if it’s completely counter to what we’ve been taught, will be blessed. Those who are “poor in spirit” have an open mind, ready to hear, see, feel, experience something new - a Truth that is from God.

So, let me paraphrase this first beatitude, “people whose minds are empty, who have the humility to know that they know nothing, will experience divine joy because in their empty minds, they’ve made room for God to fill them with God thoughts. And therefore, theirs will be the mind of God.”

SCRIPTURE..... Matthew 5:4

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

MESSAGE.....*Those that Mourn*.....Pastor Susan Boegli

The second Beatitude is “Blessed are they that mourn, for they will be comforted.” How is it possible that we will experience joy in our mourning and grieving and great sadness? First of all, God doesn’t desire for us to suffer, however, suffering is inevitable sooner or later. If you live long enough, you will suffer over something. But here’s the wisdom of Jesus’ teaching – trouble and suffering are often extremely useful, because many people will not bother to learn the Truth until driven to do so through sorrow or failure. Have you ever heard of Winston Churchill’s quote, “there’s no such thing as an atheist in a foxhole.”

Have you heard that expression before? In World War 2, the troops would dig these ditches that they would lie in so they wouldn’t be shot by the bullets flying overhead. Those ditches were called “foxholes.” (They still may be called that, I really don’t know). But if you’re ducking behind a mound of

dirt, trying to avoid being shot, you probably feel that you're in a pretty frightening situation. When we find ourselves in terribly scary situations, it's tough NOT to call out to God, whether we believe in God or not.

I can tell you from personal experience that I would never ever be standing in front of you preaching in any church if I didn't live through my own foxhole. It is because of my deep mourning that I first reached out to something greater than myself, and in that reaching, I was reached. I experienced God and ever since then I have been on a quest to experience God over and over and over again. It was in my mourning that I experienced that divine connection, thus was deeply blessed.

I know some folks who have never really known any kind of foxhole in their lives. Some folks have it pretty easy. They haven't experienced death of a loved one, they haven't walked with anyone facing a terrible disease, they have a comfortable life-style where they don't have to worry about how to pay their bills. For some people, life is pretty cush. But to tell you the truth, I really feel sorry for those people. Because the people I know who have a cush life-style, have no knowledge of God whatsoever. They have no desire to explore their spiritual selves because their physical selves are content. I don't believe those people can ever be blessed, can ever feel that profound joy that wells up from within because they have happiness. They have plenty of external things that make life enjoyable.

However, as far as I'm concerned, I'd way rather mourn and be comforted by the Divine and experience the joy of my connection with God, than never know hard times and never find the need to call out to God. Because I don't know about you but for me, I'd choose God's joy over any kind of worldly happiness in a heartbeat. So when we are able to humbly empty our minds and when we experience some particularly difficult times, we have the opportunity to know God. And that's what it is to be blessed.