

10-2-08 "Blessed are we..." Matthew 5: 1-12

A few weeks back I added a statement to every bulletin to offer to each one of us as a reminder of what we are before God. It reads:

Your life is your message: An invitation to celebrate and live what you believe. Let our worship of God be reflected in lives of hope and peace.

Today we celebrate all those who have come before us in the faith and who have lived lives of hope and peace. They are our mentors, our examples, our friends, our family of faith. We continue this tradition by our prayers, presence, gifts and service by taking a closer walk with Jesus.

If these walls could talk, I believe we'd hear, in paraphrase of course, that the success of our journey of faith has to do with the attitude we bring to Worship.

Attitude, to me, is more important than facts. It is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than failures, than successes, than what I think or say. It is more important than my appearance, giftedness or skill. It will make or break a business...a church...a home. The remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will hold close for the day. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have,

and that is our attitude. I am surely convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it. That makes the responsibility of my happiness, mine!

We read and hear the platitudes about attitudes, and most of those platitudes are true. We hear the question: "Is the glass half empty or half-full?" The answer to that question reveals a fundamental attitude of the person answering the question.

We know that attitude is more powerful than education. You can be highly educated and have a crummy attitude.

Attitude is a more powerful force than money. You can have all the money in the world, but you cannot buy happiness inside your soul. Some of the poorest I know have the best attitude.

Attitude is more powerful than circumstances. I have learned it long ago; it is not what happens to you but what you do with what happens to you that is vitally important. Over time, tragedies can make you bitter or better. Time can heal wounds, and time can wound heals!

Attitude is more important than failures. We have heard stories of the many famous people who failed miserably in their lives such as Abraham Lincoln who lost many elections before winning the presidency. Attitude is much more important than the failures we have all experienced.

Attitude is more important than successes. Success can go to my head and I can, all too easily, lose my humility. All I have to do is meet a successful athlete who has recently signed a huge contract and I realize how temptation can rule the soul.

Attitude is more important than appearance. I know that beauty doesn't make all that much difference in the long run, because time takes its toll and no amount of Botox will turn time around.

Attitude is more powerful than giftedness, skill or talent. I can buy the most talented team of baseball players, football players, basketball players, but the team that wins usually has talent plus a winning, dedicated attitude. A talented team cannot win without a positive attitude.

It is with this reality that we approach the Beatitudes of Jesus.

Matthew nestles nine imperatives of Christian life between Jesus' re-working of the Commandments and His instructions on how to pray. For Matthew the concept of "Beatitudes" represents the "fortunate" amongst us who understand: *the attitudes of being; the attitudes of existence; the general attitudes for life and living*. Notice that Jesus talked to his disciples about the fundamental attitudes of life, about the kind of people that God wanted them, his learners, to be. Jesus didn't talk about money; he didn't talk about health; he didn't talk about jobs and job security and job possibilities; he didn't talk about kids and living one's life through one's children or grandchildren. Jesus shared his Be-attitudes, and that is what I would like to concentrate on today. I would like to talk about Jesus' basic attitudes of life and living.

There are nine BE-attitudes and I would like to examine each one.

First, "happy are the poor in spirit." That is kind of a strange phrase, "poor in spirit." What does that mean? I believe this means that I know my need of God. I recognize my spiritual bankruptcy. Because my relationship with God depends on His grace, I know I'm incapable of earning God's love on my own.

It is true that often poor people know their need of God more than richer people, and so the Gospel of Luke translates this, happy are the poor; that is, poor people often know their need of God and, given the opportunity, many are known to be generous with what they have. The New Century Version of Matthew speaks to a blessing for those who "understand their spiritual poverty" for their value will be found in heaven. The Message states, "you're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God.."

My experience as a non-profit director in agencies that help the poor has informed me that poverty can be a strange form of gift. Having the stuff of life stripped away, the luxury, the boredom, the distractions, brings me to a place where my priorities are clear. Serious illness may accomplish this. Major life changes may do this. When all is stripped away, many will realize their need for God.

Second, Jesus said, "Happy or joyful are those who mourn." That sounds strange, doesn't it? Said another way, "How blessed are those who can feel the pain of others." To feel the pain of others is to be truly a human being. Maybe I feel the pain that sin, including my own, causes. I can let others know when I'm hurting without embarrassment. I can weep like Jesus did.

When I think about Jesus saying to welcome the little ones, that we must be like children before Him, I begin to understand that honest emotions, including grief, are God's way of cleansing our souls.

Third, Jesus said, "Happy are those who are humble and meek." Do you know how miserable it is to always be seeking glory? Jesus says I don't have to be the strong one who is always in

control. I can be tender and gentle. If I've given control of my life to God, I don't, always, have to win.

Here I think on a comment of a friend many years ago. She told me that persons are only born meek, it isn't anything a person might aspire to. At that time I disagreed without know why. Since, I've learned that like patience, we can pray for what we need and then God will create the circumstances in life to bring us to that place. This is not, necessarily, comfortable learning.

Fourth, Jesus said, "Happy and joyful are those who hunger and thirst for what is right." When I think of hungering and thirsting, I think of someone who has a real craving, a craving for water when thirsty, a craving for food when starving. There are people who crave to do what is right. They say, "I want to know God and His will for my life more than anything else - including my own pleasure, status or success." These are souls whose hearts long for God.

When I think of such people, I immediately think of Martin Luther King, Jr. and his craving for justice and righteousness for black people. He was willing to die for his craving, his passion, his intense struggle for justice and righteousness. He was an incredible and yet, very human, man. I also think of my grandfather, George, who taught me so much about what is right. He made sure I was well loved and nurtured. He took me to LaFayette Lanes every Saturday of my youth, to teach me the art of team sports. When I think of justice in society, I honor his memory too!

Fifth, "happy or joyful are those who are merciful and kind."

Happy are those who are kind to other people who keep on making mistakes. When I thought about this BE-attitude, I had to think of the Man himself, Jesus. Not once in the Bible do you

ever hear Jesus condemning anybody for making a mistake. Not once! Not once does Jesus ever condemn a person for doing wrong. He simply forgives that person and asks them to live in wholeness. Further, I can share the feelings of persons who are hurting, lonely or distressed, and walk alongside them in their pain. God has given me a sensitivity for the suffering of others and a compassion to help them.

In my many years of community organizing and service, I found I was able to walk in the shoes of others, sometimes a mile, sometimes more. When I help someone in distress, I attempt to look at the total person and not the problem. This sensitivity made me a credible Social Worker.

Sixth, "happy or joyful are the pure in heart." This is a fundamental attitude. Purity of heart is important in a sexually obsessed society.

Being pure in heart implies complete honesty with God and others. I don't have to put on a false front or pretend to be something I'm not. My life is marked with openness and integrity.

Seven. Jesus continued, "Blessed and happy are the peacemakers." Peacemakers are also found in homes, marriages, and at work. Jesus said, "There is an inner joy to peacemakers, who take the risks so that we can live in peace." This implies an effort to work hard to keep channels of communication open with others. Rather than allowing anger to fester, I deal with them constructively. I help those around me to work out their differences without hurting one another. What a gift!

Eight and nine. "Happy and joyful are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who are reviled for God." It is easier to think

of those great names amongst us than to think of ourselves as persecuted. Our culture has a crafty and insidious way of bending our will away from God. Putting God first in our lives has its eternal benefits. For example, I know for whom and for what I am living. And for this I am willing to suffer and (if need be) stand alone for what is right. At the very least, I can take criticism without reacting defensively or feeling self-pity.

Jesus says these are the basic attitudes of being, the basic attitudes for existence, the core attitudes for living and life. Interestingly enough, all of these nine qualities are often found in the same person. These nine qualities seem to belong together.

Today I admit a bit of nervousness as I look to my country and community for meaning in my life. In paraphrase Jesus said, "Happiness has nothing to do with wealth, education, health, job, kids, success, failure. Inner joy has to do with the attitudes of being, the basic attitudes for life and living."

Putting myself into God's world. My interpretation for my life:

Blessed am I when I let go of my possessions for the kingdom of God becomes burden-free. **I am acutely aware that what I gather into my house, garage, basement and attic may seem justified but be wasted for soon this life will be over.**

Blessed am I when I know the ache of hunger for the empty places in body and soul are fertile soil for new growth.

It is dangerous for me when I fill my life or stomach to capacity and then fail to recognize what is missing.

Blessed am I when I know sorrow for the ache of love lost is witness to the seed planted.

It is better to know the pain of grief because that's when the fullness of love may be woven into the fabric of my life.

Blessed am I when I receive scorn for the rejection of others keeps me mindful of who I live for.

Watch out in my dependence on the approval of others for then I may not be able to dance with the Spirit of God.

Today is All Saints Day and saints are those who walk with Jesus. To be a saint to live with the BE-attitudes in your heart. Amen.

Notes:

The Serendipity Bible (NIV translation)

The Devotional Bible

The Harper Collins Study Bible (NRSV translation)

The Message (Bible)

The Parallel Study Bible

Article: All Saints, Attitudes and Be-Attitudes