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ON BEING BLESSED

There are many things about JESUS that I find fascinating.

- Today we begin several weeks of looking at one of them—the Sermon on the Mount.
  - And here’s why I find these readings so interesting.
- At the age of 30, JESUS gets baptized, spends 40 days in the desert, is tempted by the devil, calls a few disciples together, and begins what we call HIS “public ministry.”
  - HE had a lot of time to think about HIS first speech or sermon or teaching.
  - Already crowds are following HIM around because of the things HE’S been doing—healings and other miracles.
  - Now it’s time to focus HIS message and inspire the movement HE was leading.
    - And the first thing out of HIS mouth, the first sentence of HIS speech, the first discourse HE gives to define HIS ministry begins like this:
      - *Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of GOD.*
      - *Blessed are those who mourn.*
      - *Blessed are the meek.*
      - *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst.*
      - *Blessed are the merciful.*
      - *Blessed are the pure in heart.*
      - *Blessed are the peacemakers.*
      - *Blessed are those who are persecuted.*
- The first things that JESUS teaches is how to recognize blessedness.
  - I find this fascinating because HE is not saying how to become blessed, or even how to bless others, but rather to recognize who is already blessed by GOD.
    - And what makes this particularly important is when we realize that those who are blessed are not necessarily who we might think are blessed.

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Every community has its own definition of what constitutes blessedness.

- We may not always use such a pious word, preferring to call it “the good life” or “success,” but we all have definitions of what it means to have made it.
  - Truth be told, those definitions rarely include the ones who are poor in spirit, or who mourn, or who are meek, or pure in heart, or all the rest.
  - In our world, when we think of someone who is blessed, we most often think of the wealthy, or powerful, or famous, or successful, or beautiful, or enviable.
    - Blessing, at least according to the standards of the world, is most often of the material kind.

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But JESUS teaches something different, though even today, we may struggle with how to understand these beatitudes—these statements on blessing.

- For example, on All Saints’ Day, it is common to use the text, “blessed are those who mourn” to help us feel better when we recall those who we have lost from our lives to death.
  - But that’s not really what JESUS is talking about there.
- JESUS invites us to see that GOD calls blessed those who are mourning, not for the losses in their lives, but for their world, because the world isn’t what GOD intended it to be.
  - Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted,
    - comforted as they understand that GOD goes with them as they strive to bring the world more and more in line with GOD’S will and vision.

- Backing up, JESUS tells us that the poor in spirit are blessed because they recognize that they still need even greater faith to do the work GOD calls them to.
  - As they seek to grow in their trust in GOD, they will become more and more a part of GOD'S Kingdom in the world.
- The meek are blessed because they have humbled themselves before GOD, by not believing that they have all the answers or that their way is the best.
  - They will inherit the earth in that their willingness to submit to GOD'S plan will allow them to see themselves as part of GOD'S vision for the world.
- Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness—who yearn for more of GOD'S Kingdom in their life—are blessed.
  - Their hunger for GOD in their lives will lead them to be filled with the joy of increasingly knowing GOD and better understanding GOD'S will for them and all of creation.
- Those who show mercy are blessed.
  - Their words of forgiveness to others, on their own behalf and on GOD'S, will allow them to claim the joy of GOD'S mercy in their lives.
- JESUS wants us to see that the pure of heart are blessed.
  - Those who are able to only see the good in others will do so as they see the image of GOD in everyone around them.
- The peacemakers are blessed as their efforts to convey the peace that passes all understanding brings others in touch with GOD.
  - Their efforts will lead others to recognize them as sons and daughters of GOD.
- Those who are persecuted because of righteousness are blessed.
  - Their labors to advocate for and to assist and to be with those who are treated unjustly and who have no voice is Kingdom work.
    - Theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

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Blessings are powerful, especially in a world that so rarely blesses.

- We are quick with affirmation and accusation, but not so accustomed to blessing each other.
  - Perhaps the only time we speak a word of blessing is when someone sneezes, and then usually without mentioning GOD.
- Consider though, that if it is not GOD who blesses, then who does?
  - Maybe as practice when we share GOD'S peace with one another in here, we might also speak a word of blessing to each other, that we might hear over and over again in our lives, "GOD bless you."
    - Trying this activity in here, might help each of us to speak GOD'S blessing to others out there.

But in addition to blessing one another, as we consider extending that blessing to those we meet this week, let us not forget those we don't often perceive as deserving of blessing are precisely those GOD choose to bless and honor and love.

- GOD favors those in need.
  - So, JESUS urges HIS followers, then and now, to look at those around us differently than our culture does.
    - Rather than measure person's worth by their possessions, we are invited—no, commanded—to see their character—their heart and their spirit.
    - Rather than merely taking pity on their losses, we are invited to enter into their lives with blessing.

- Rather than judging their failings, we are invited to forgive and remind them that they are blessed by GOD and born for more than they've perhaps settled for.
- Rather than rejecting them for their weakness, let us seek to see that weakness may be the truest and most honest point of meeting between GOD'S children.
  - For GOD reveals GOD'S self to us most clearly and consistently at our places of deepest need.

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And lest you feel that this is just another call to go and do for others, let me also speak GOD'S word of blessing to you.

- If you are feeling weak in spirit right now, know this.
  - JESUS is yours, and you are HIS.
- If you are mourning for the way the world is;
- if you are feeling humbled before GOD'S awesomeness;
- if you are starving and dying of thirst for mercy and justice for the least of these in our world, or even for yourself,
  - you are blessed of GOD.

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GOD always comes where we least expect GOD to be—amid our brokenness and weakness and insecurity—

- in order to bless that which the world refuses to bless,
- to love what the world calls unlovable,
- and to redeem what the world refuses to believe is worthy of saving.
  - JESUS wants us to know that GOD'S Kingdom isn't a place far away,
    - but is found where GOD'S love places the priority on forgiveness and mercy and grace and goodness.
  - GOD'S Kingdom is found whenever we honor each other as GOD'S dearly loved children,
    - and bear each other's burdens, bind each other's wounds, meet each other's needs, and announce GOD'S blessing upon each other.

JESUS says this because HE stands, not in solidarity with the rich and powerful.

- HE says this because HE lives this; HE shows this; HE is this with you and all others who are struggling to be more and more aligned with the Kingdom of GOD.
  - And when you are fighting for the poor, or the forgotten, or the down-trodden, or the low in spirit, then you are blessed.
    - You will be comforted.
    - You will be filled.
    - You will see GOD.
    - Rejoice for yours is the Kingdom of heaven.