

Sermon

This is Just the Way Things are...Get Used to It

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January 29, 2023

Our biblical year changed from Year C to Year A a few weeks ago which means our Gospel focus is changing from Luke to Matthew. Luke is the great historian who continually reminds us of how the people were effected by what had transpired for generations before them. There were stories, powerful stories, that are unique only to Luke's gospel such as the conversation between Mary and Martha and the story of the Good Samaritan, both of which require a deep knowledge of historical perspective in order to understand the impact of what is told. Matthew has a very different approach that will impact us as we travel through this Gospel in the coming year. Matthew perceives God as present and active in Jesus with many stories of the things Jesus did. Matthew's telling gives us a front row seat of sorts, almost allowing us to feel like we are there experiencing it along with the Gospel writer. In order for this Gospel to be meaningful, we have to truly receive Jesus. We often are asked to approve or disapprove of those who perceive Jesus and His ministry. We are asked to do the will of God as Jesus teaches it. By urging us to identify with those characters who "receive" Jesus and "do" God's will, Matthew persuades us to emulate their example.

Today we begin with the poetic, beautiful and impractical Beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. "Blessed are the meek, for they will

¹ commentary from [Feasting on the Word, Year A](#), on Micah 6:1-8 by Carol J. Dempsey
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inherit the earth. “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will 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 people 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 in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Whenever we hear the Beatitudes, we are struck with their poetic beauty and, at the same time, overwhelmed by their perceived impracticality for the world in which we live. The truth is, while these ideas sound wonderful, we live in a time when the blessings are given are to those who succeed, often at the expense of others. To be poor in spirit, peaceful, merciful and meek will get you nowhere in a culture grounded in competition and fear.

I recall a time when I was in my High School American History class and my teacher said, do you believe the United States Government kills people? And we all, especially me, emphatically said no. And he then began to list off people who they indeed did assassinate through the years. And in that moment, I remember feeling confused, disappointed and cynical. So many things as I grew into adulthood lifted my rose-colored glasses as I began to experience the world as it

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was and understood what I was truly up against. My cynicism morphed itself into a mantra of, “Well, that’s just the way it is...might as well get used to it.”

This has been a difficult month both for our community and our nation once again. A mass shooting in California targeting Asian Americans and locally Jaylan McWilson was shot in front of his . mother’s home here in Niagara Falls. The needless death of Tyre Nichols at the hands of Memphis police. And many more. So I ask you, Is this just the way it is...and we might as well get used to it?

Or are we waiting for another Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy, Mahatma Ghandi, Mother Theresa? Someone who can lead us toward peace? Cynicism offers little hope that things will get better but the Beatitudes invite us to the opposite point of view, which is hopefulness. But in a world like this, filled with violence, how can we possibly be peaceful? How can we be meek and humble? Lets reread that scripture one more time...”Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Blessed are the peacemakers...MLK, Bobby Kennedy, Ghandi, Mother Theresa – were peacemakers – they themselves worked toward action to achieve peace. They and we place our hope in Christ, who offered hope to the hopeless. When we stand with Christ, we become **hopeful**. We move away from cynicism of you better get used to it, and we stand in the world sure of the possibility that the day will come when mercy, humility, peace and love are the descriptions of what it means to live.

How do we truly become a peacemaker? How can we truly live into this scripture in a world that seems determined to ignore it? Jesus ministry was very

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simple really – He showed us again and again what it means to have true compassion. Now compassion is not the same as sympathy or pity. To have pity on another person means that you feel sorry for them. Sympathy means that you understand what another person is experiencing and so you offer some advise. But compassion, as defined by the late Henry Nouwen means “you grow with the inner recognition that your neighbor shares your humanity with you. This partnership cuts through all walls which might have kept you separate. Across all barriers of land and language, wealth and poverty, knowledge and ignorance, we are one, created from the same dust, subject to the same laws, destined for the same end.”

Tonight Community Missions and Snug is holding an Anti-Violence Rally in honor of Jaylan McWilson at 5:00 pm at True Bethel Church on South Avenue. “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.” Please pray for the family and pray for peace in our community.

Our scripture from Micah asks a question in the face of these moments of disruption and disappointment. The writer cries, “With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?” And I think we are asking the same question. What can we truly do to make an impact? How do we live into this Jesus compassion? How can we share that with our brother sister? None of these symbols of sacrifice pleases God when they are stripped from the context that gives them meaning. Prayer in and of itself, is it enough? Is there more we could

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do individually, as a church community? God desires more than empty words from us. We express our horror at these acts, but God desires justice that is measured by how well the most vulnerable fare in the community. Now it is important to remember that God has already passed his judgement on the people of Israel and by the time Micah poses his rhetorical question, what does the Lord require of us? Israel is already on the defensive.

So are we? Do we try to hold on to the old world? Things were simpler then – people went to church on Sundays – the pews were full. But the world we live in today was birthed from the world that we sometimes look back upon – and like me, in my High School History Class, the rose colored glasses must be removed. The world was fully segregated then – education, housing – were not equally distributed and they still are not today. The oppression that was put in place then led us to where we are today. Just as the misbehavior of the Israelites led God to bring down his sledgehammer upon them and give them this mantra – What does the Lord require of you? To seek justice and love kindness and walk humbly with your God.

Peacemakers seek justice. Peacemakers love kindness and peacemakers are humble. Peace is not a place, it is a way of being. While God was angry with God's people, the true message in this passage speaks to God's deep and abiding love, while providing God's people with a proscriptio for God's will, right relationship and the full flourishing of the common good. A full flourishing of the common good. The word I am celebrating this year is no longer anti-racism...it is unification. We are different in beautiful ways but despite this, if we are to flourish, we must unite with other faiths, with people of no faith, with community leaders, and schools.

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Given the scientific fact that all of creation is part of one unified web of life, the practice of justice and love now needs to embrace both human and nonhuman life, and the humble walk with God is a walk of holy reverence and awe across the planet with people being attuned to and learning from the divine Spirit that pulsates at the heart of all.¹

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