



OUR DAILY BREAD
Resources for Spiritual Questers

How We Can Be Peacemakers

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in Washington, D.C.*



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Reading: Matthew 5:1-11

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

“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 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.”¹

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The Gospel this morning is taken from Matthew 5 and it's famously known as 'the Beatitudes/the Sermon on the Mount.' And 'Beatitudes' means blessings; these are the blessings. And this is Jesus' sermon for us. We have the Lord's Prayer, this is the Lord's sermon. Now over the past few weeks in sermons I can't help as I'm preaching, to think about the strife and the chaos and the crisis that our country is in right now. And I looked at this text and thought "What can we learn from the Beatitudes? What can we learn from the Sermon on the Mount that applies to what's going on in our country today? What can we as Christians learn that we could respond?"

And yet this last week with the recent executive order banning refugees, the battle lines in our country seemed to have only gotten more intense. I know I'm not here to talk to you about what I think politically and in fact a recent survey showed that people in church don't really care what their pastor thinks so I will share my opinion on politics. But I am curious to find out: what could we learn from scripture? Is there guidance from the Lord for us in these really difficult times and what is the role for us as Christians and what is the role of the church and this church in this town at this time?

I do believe Jesus is giving us the road map to what it means to be a Christian disciple in this text. And most importantly, what jumped out at me this week was the phrase "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God." This last week I spent time at something called the Civic Collabatory. It is people that meet from around the country who are involved in how to improve American Civil Society and civil life: how can we make it better? What can we do to improve it? And as you can imagine for people who that is their business and they are gathered from all over the country and we are meeting for dinner in the Holocaust Museum, you can imagine that we had a lot of thinking to do. What is our role? Because when Civil Society falls down, when those battles increase, we know what follows.

When there aren't peacemakers, warriors replace them and win. In looking at the Gospel today I realized how counter-culture it is to our society today, particularly our Washington DC Society. What Jesus said then was as radical today as it was two thousand years ago. For the fun of it I thought "What would be the blessings or the Beatitudes for the Sermon on the Mount if it was written for Christians in Washington today who want to put forth their career. I've got a short version. Are you ready?"

This is the Beatitudes for politics today:

“Blessed are those who win for there's is the kingdom.

Blessed are those who get their way for they will be happy.

Blessed are those who speak over others for they will gain sound bites.

Blessed are those who know they are right, for they don't need to hear.

Blessed are the snarky for they will gain twitter followers.

Blessed are the attack dogs for they will get great book deals.

Blessed are the people who rave about your brilliance for you shall be called a thought leader. “

That's the prevailing attitude, the beatitude, the blessing of our culture right now. And Jesus turns this completely upside down. It runs counter to everything that we're thought about being successful, particularly here in Washington.

When Jesus says "Blessed are the pure in spirit..." I believe he's saying that the more you know, the less you know; the more you grow spiritually, the more you are aware of your own thoughts. You become humble then you realize that you are in fact poor in spirit.

"Blessed are those who mourn..." Those who care about the suffering in the world are sad. The sadness in the world at times makes us want to cry. I noticed the great mystics often talked about the ministry of crying and said that as they grew spiritually everything was more intense and they cried more often but for shorter periods of time then they moved on. They felt the pain for the world.

"Blessed are the meek..." means the person who is willing to speak last if at all, waiting to let others say what's needed. It means no longer having to win the debate. It means facilitating the debate.

"Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness..." means seeking a better world. To be a Christian means to be seeking a better world; this world, to bring greater Justice, not in our spare time but it means with our life. It requires us to be constantly curious, calm and purposeful.

"Blessed are the merciful..." means operating from a position of mercy knowing that by the grace of God go I. It recognizes that there are no borders to God's love. Merciful people have done their own inventory. They forgive because they've been forgiven.

"Blessed are the pure in heart," means operating from a place of authenticity, compassion and truth. It seeks to find God in everyone, especially those we want to hate.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted...," means not conforming and not conforming to your tribe, to your team or to your side. It often means standing alone. Bridge builders get walked on as bridges. When we think of the great spiritual teachers and great political leaders: Ghandi, King, Rabin, Bonhoeffer, we remember they were not killed by other nations; they were killed by their own team for betraying the team. Anyone who steps out of the Partisan March in our country right now risks standing alone. I think that's important for peacemakers.

"Blessed are those who are reviled and denounced for my sake," means that when we truly follow Jesus, chances are we will be demonized at times and misrepresented. We have to stop wanting to be liked, we must be willing to be misunderstood, even by those closest to us to follow Jesus Christ.

At the end Jesus says "Rejoice and be glad for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you..." One prophet of the modern age that I'd like to quote from is the Reverend Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I quote him for a number of reasons: he's an inspiration to me, this is Holocaust Memorial week, we remember the people who were killed in the Holocaust. He led the Christian Church in opposition to Hitler and he's also my cousin so I have a familial connection. In his book 'The Cost of Discipleship,' he reminds us that the Christian life doesn't make sense. It doesn't fit in. We don't have to understand it; we have to follow it. I love this quote:

"Discipleship is not limited to what you can comprehend. It must transcend all comprehension. Plunge into the deep waters beyond your own comprehension and I will help you to comprehend even as I do. Bewilderment is the true comprehension. Not to know where you're going is true knowledge. God says my comprehension transcends yours."²

Today in the gospel Jesus has given us a radical sermon about what it is to be a Christian. Let us not comprehend it, let us follow it and let us each accept our role and the role as a community to be peacemaker at this very critical time in the world. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven." Amen.

² Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. London: SCM Press, 2015.