

SERMON – Blessings – Heart Prayers: Blessing the World

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 5:1-12

Throughout this series we have been exploring how to feel the blessings of God as we experience life, the good times and times of struggles, in the routines and season of life, to the special “once in a moment” times. Today I wish to move the focus away from us and focus it outwards. The proclamation of today helps us to understand the need for the shift.

“Knowing the richness of blessing, we cannot help but hear God’s invitation to extend our sense of blessing to God’s beloved world and its peoples.”

When I first read those words I thought about the old song, “Magic Penny.” Do you remember its words?

Love is something if you give it away, give it away, give it away.
Love is something if you give it away, You end up having more.

So even though our focus is outward, in blessing others we feel even more the blessings of God. The Greek word that begins each phrase of the Beatitudes has long been translated as blessed. It is saying we are blessed when we do those things Jesus called us to do. Another equally good word that is now often used in recent translations is happy. Happy are people who.... I want to ask you a question. Do you want to feel fully the blessings of God? Do you want to feel a happiness that can only come from God? Of course you do. As Jesus understood, as we still are called to learn, this blessed happiness comes to us when we turn and share the love of God with others. As we see them responding to God’s blessings, our spiritual cup is filled to overflowing.

Pope Francis recently wrote “New Beatitudes.” Before that he was quoted as saying: The best description of the saints — in fact, their “identity card,” is found in the beatitudes from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. As saints have done throughout the ages, Christ’s followers today are called “to confront the troubles and anxieties of our age with the spirit and love of Jesus.” Here are a few of his new beatitudes for us today:

“Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalized and show them their closeness.”

“Blessed are those who see God in every person and strive to make others also discover God.”

“Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home.”

If you wish to see his full Beatitudes they are on-line. But again, from the time of Jesus to today, we are challenged to first, be filled with the blessings of God, but then turn those blessings outwards allowing others to be blessed and feel blessings as well.

I hope that during this series you have taken the time to become fully aware of how much God loves you and is blessing each and every moment of life. We learned that even in the most challenging of times there are blessings coming our way. This awareness has filled me with awe. I am again so aware of God’s love for me. It is humbling. Have you felt that? I hope so.

The Irish understand that being filled with the awareness of God’s love surrounding us and guiding us is a good thing, but it is not enough. This awareness should make us desire more than anything to share that idea with others. Don’t you wish everyone could truly understand and accept the idea that God is blessing them? I do. We need to understand that the best way for others to know that God blesses them is through our loving and caring about them. That is why we are ending with the challenge to bless the world.

Today I want to lift up just two of Jesus’ Beatitudes to help us see how this is a way to transform the world, but even more to find deep and abiding happiness. My hope, in doing so, is that you will go home and re-read all of these admonitions of Jesus and pray, “Lord, help me to feel blessed by acting this way. And then sit awhile and let the Spirit help you to know what God is calling you to do to make that prayer a reality.

I am going to be using the Common English Bible translation. They translate the third one as: “Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.” We may know it better as “blessed are the meek.” The word we are translating can mean meek, humble or even gentle. Jesus was trying to help people to understand that they need to reject the world’s view of power. Meek is the opposite of those who have climbed to positions of authority using power and threat. It is not saying that you have to walk around with a doormat on your back saying “walk on me.” It is instead reminding us that we live with an understanding that God is our authority. That means that we are

willing to serve instead of being served. To step to the back of the line instead of demanding our place. By living this way we feel blessed and are a blessing to others.

I think about a simple example. Awhile back I was in line at the grocery store. I had a few items but noticed someone behind me with just one item who was scanning the checkout lines to see if this was the shortest. He was obviously in a hurry. I smiled and asked him if he needed to go ahead. He said thanks, paid for his purchase and just as he turned to leave gave me a smile. Now I had blessed him but I was the one feeling blessed. He didn't know I did it in Christ's name but I hope his being aware that not everyone demands their place in line will cause him to think the next time he is in a line and can pass the blessing on. For a moment I was a citizen of God's kingdom and it felt good.

The other one I will lift up is: "Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy." Mercy here refers to concrete acts instead of having a merciful attitude. It is doing things for others because they are hurting. It is showing compassion to the marginalized, as Pope Francis said. Or, here is a quote going around social media right now from Senator Cory Booker:

"Before you speak to me about your religion, first show it to me in how you treat other people; before you tell me how much you love your God, show me in how much you love all His children; before you preach to me of your passion for your faith, teach me about it through your compassion for your neighbors. In the end, I'm not as interested in what you have to tell or sell as I am in how you choose to live and give." — Cory Booker

When we share mercy, helping people in specific ways, we are blessing them but we are also blessed. We, as a church are supporting the work of our missionary to Nepal, Katherine Parker. Over the last few years we have given thousands to provide smokeless stoves for families and making sure schools have supplies. It is a deliberate act of mercy. Then, to hear from her how it has made a difference is such a blessing. We have been so supportive that she made sure and put us first on her visitation schedule so she can be with us on a Sunday, which will be in March. We don't help to get thanks, or for missionaries to come. We help because we want to transform the world. But when we hear that we are making a difference we receive a gift of blessing.

The Irish have something they call Heart Prayers. These are specific prayers asking God to bless, to share love with another, who is hurting. Both of our poems that were shared today were heart prayers. What prayers do you need to lift up for this community, our nation, our world? Where is God's blessing needed most? What can we do to not only speak the prayers of our heart but make them a reality, even if it is in the tiniest of ways. For when we live filled with blessings and attempting to bless we are agents of transformation. We are not speaking our faith but living it.

So write your own beatitudes of blessing. Think of what you need to do in God's eyes that will make God and others happy, which will in turn fill you with happiness. And may we always walk in faith aware that we are blessed to be a blessing.