

A Sermon
“THE BEATITUDES SAY IT ALL”
Dr. Russ Seger
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SCRIPTURE: Matthew 5: 1-12

Now, when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach 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 be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers
for they will be called sons of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Richard Rohr, is a Catholic priest who rather goes against the flow. In his book, SIMPLICITY, he tells a story about his friend, Harry Roberts. Harry is speaking to someone and he says, “Do you want to know the most important tasks of a human being?” “Oh yes”, replied the other person, “I sure do”. “Well there are really only three tasks that matter in our life.” “What are they?” “First, quiet the busy-ness in your mind. Pay attention to your inner life. And then find your song. Once you have found your song, begin to sing it.” Those are the three things that the story teller says about the value and wonder of life.

I believe that in the Beatitudes Jesus was singing his song, a beautiful song, a wonderful song. Jesus continues to invite us to sing along with him. Blessed are they....Blessed be the name. But I think even more, Jesus is inviting us to find our own song too. In essence, we could all sing the melody, but Jesus is inviting us to harmonize – to sing along but to sing with our own voice and our own song and our own wonder and belief and truth.

But of course there are things that stand in our way. In the sermon that I preached a few weeks ago I suggested that there were impediments to world communion – things that keep us from really being able to sit down and commune – to be in each other’s presence.

The last of those you might remember was “...our hectic way of life.” I suggested that we probably all suffer from a form of ADD, that is, Attention Deficit Disorder. In fact, if we don’t have something going on in our lives from moment to moment to moment to moment, we are nervous and upset and anxious.

The more I look around, I ask myself the question, “What can I do to quiet the busy-ness of my own mind so that the song of God, the song of the Universe can be heard again within me – so that I can hear the songs of the birds and the wind and the wonder and the beauty of our world?”

I think for far too long we have tried to motivate people to find this by forcing them through guilt and fear. But nothing that I know mutes the song of life more than guilt and fear. Nothing that I know takes away the joy of life more than somebody telling me I’m bad. “You did it wrong, Russ. Bad you!”

In my reading of the Beatitudes and the rest of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, I have to confront the busy-ness of my own mind – those things that block the melody of my life. I told our church school class today that I like to turn the Scripture upside down. The Beatitudes are such beautiful poetry that you really don’t want to mess with it. But I like to turn the crucible upside down, so I rewrote them. Some of them are kind of ‘yukky’.

Blessed are the conceited for the world is theirs for the taking.
 Blessed are the happy for they are always blind to loss.
 Blessed are the selfish. There is never enough for them or for me.
 Blessed are the mean for they will always take advantage.
 Blessed are the schemers for they know who and how to hurt others.
 Blessed are the war-mongers for they will rape and pillage and plunder.
 Blessed are they who persecute for they relish in making others hurt
 and feel small.

That’s turning the Scripture upside down. But I thought as I was working on that in my own mind how often that really seems to be the way of life that we emulate, that we as a community or a society or a world seem to accept as ‘what is’. Jesus turns that world upside down and calls us – invites us to look with wonder and beauty and purity and gentleness and a sense of safety at life with each other.

So I have to confront the busy-ness in my own life. One of the things that I have to confront for myself is the delusion of independence or success if we want to put it in another word. **I can make it on my own!**

It appears that in the Sermon on the Mount in the Beatitudes Jesus is suggesting a radical dependence upon each other. Being poor in spirit is not a negative thing. It acknowledges that I am deeply dependent on other people, that I cannot arrange my life in such a way **that I do not need you!**

I think of it as we grow older. How badly do we need each other in the last years of our lives? And when we lose a spouse, how lonely is it? Where do we pick up those pieces? We're not independent. We're radically dependent upon each other and the community of faith has to be sensitive to those issues so that we bring people together and nourish and support and affirm and recognize our incredible dependence. I think that is one of the works of the church – to help us see beyond the delusion of self-sufficiency and recognize that together we succeed but alone we fall and we are left.

The second delusion that I have to deal with is my struggle with security. This week I was confronted by a friend of mine. She asked me, “Russ, how much do you need? Aren't you really rich?” Now I've never thought of myself as rich. It's hard for me to grasp those terms. The minute she said it I thought of a news program that I saw some months ago about the five hundred billionaires in this country. They were talking about their mansions and their boats. One fellow had a nine million dollar yacht that he used twice a year - \$6,000.00 a month slip fee. That was to store the boat. The interviewer asked him, “Are you rich?” He said, “Oh, I don't think of it that way at all.” WHAT??

It's a delusion isn't it? It doesn't make any difference where you are on the scale. You do not see yourself as rich, yet how rich are we folks? How blessed are we? I have to look at my own delusion carefully and begin to rethink my understanding of security. Meister Eckart said, “The spiritual life has more to do with subtraction than addition.”

I kind of chuckled last week. I don't know if you got my joke about the insignificant writer, Leo Tolstoy. He wrote a series of short stories and one of the stories is “How Much Land Does One Man Need?” It's only about 7 or 8 pages long but I thought it was too lengthy to read today so I want to paraphrase it.

There was a guy who had the promise from a wealthy landowner that he could have as much land as he could walk around in a day. So he starts off early in the morning with vim and vigor and he walks until the sun is high in the sky. When he looks back, he realizes that he has gone far too far to get back before the sun goes down.

The truth of the matter is that when the sun goes down, that's the amount of land he can have. So he starts his way back and he works harder and harder and harder. He is within sight. He trips and he falls. He is so tired that he can hardly get himself up again, but he just has to try.

He jumps to his feet and he pushes himself to the end and makes it. And then he dies. How much land does one man need?

A powerful story told much better by Tolstoy than me.

The delusion I believe, is that we need more and more and more and more to make us secure. But it doesn't get there. There is never, NEVER quite enough. Less is really more to those people who have nothing to prove and nothing to protect. Yet, do you know how insidious that need for security really is?

The third thing that I thought of as I was working on this wonderful piece of poetry, The Beatitudes, was my own delusion about power. I believe this stands in my way. It is a compulsion. Now, it isn't so much that I want to be in charge. I don't want to be the President of the United States or king of the world. I don't have any assumption that I would ever be there. **I just want to have life under control.** That's where power comes for me. I just want to be able to manage things. But it rarely ever works out that way.

It seems that one of the givens of life is that things never work out the way you think they should. Until we have that willingness to flow with that and to honor it as a part of the way of life – until that happens we are constantly living under the delusion of power.

Some weeks ago I had a conversation with my friend, Judge Hansen who recently retired. He said to me, "Russ, I'd never want your job because you absolutely have no power. You know, when I put the hammer down on the bench, people have to do what I say. When I say 'Go to jail', that's what they have to do. But you can only change peoples' minds by persuasion. You don't have any power."

I wondered about that. I think about it a lot. What changes our minds? What is it that really turns us around and helps us to see the world as Jesus invited us to see it? Read those twelve verses again when you go home. And then read the rest of the three chapters of the Sermon on the Mount and ask yourself, "How can I see the world like Jesus saw it or am I caught in that delusion of thinking the blessed people are the 'conceited, the happy, the selfish, the mean, the war-mongers and the persecutors?'"

The Beatitudes are a way of life – a way that will transform us and help us to be all we can be to each other. Let us live them day by day. Amen.