



Beatitudes

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus goes up on a mountain, withdrawing from the crowds. Only his disciples followed him to hear him teach about the kingdom of God. Hear now how Eugene Peterson has paraphrased this well-known and often quoted text, *The Beatitudes*:

(read from *The Message*, Matthew 5: 1-12¹).

It's quite different from the words in our Scripture insert (NRSV), isn't it? Different focus. "**You** are blessed" rather than "blessed are the (category)".

Sometimes we need to hear from a different perspective to more fully grasp the truth. Not alternative facts by any means but the truth of God that calls us to love everyone and most especially those that are different from us.

Today is the 5th time that I stand before you with a "state of the church" message. Our fifth anniversary of being together as people and priest. We need each other. Without each other we are not the beloved or the blessed community that has been called by Jesus to "go and make disciples of all the world." Not the community that is called to love one another as God has loved us. This is not always an easy path but it is the one we have been charged with becoming. We have been charged with being a light to the world and salt of the earth. "You are blessed when you care. At the moment you find yourself care-full, you find yourselves cared for."

In our Annual Report, we highlight various ministries of St. John's. Some are outward focused towards the world and some are focused on worship and programs such as Sunday formation or Bible Study – gatherings that give us comfort and strength for the journey and education that can deepen our walk with God and our neighbors. If you haven't already done so, take a moment to look at all the ways in which we have reached out into the world through our Outreach Ministry. And that list does not take into account the myriad of ways so many of you volunteer in other organizations in town. You are the light of the world when you give of yourself to help those who have needs that we can help meet. We cannot always meet all the needs, but we can meet some of those needs through our Outreach and our compassion towards all of God's children. "You are blessed when you get your inside world – your mind and your heart- put right. Then you can see God in the outside world."

Ken Costa, founder of the Alpha program and author of *Know Your Why* and *God at Work*, reminds us that our work station can be and should be our worship station. That is, if we truly follow Jesus Christ, then regardless of the work we do to earn a living, we ought to be followers of Jesus at that work. He does not mean preaching or trying to convert others at your secular work but rather working in ways that honor the gifts and talents you have been given. Let your decision to follow Jesus be made known to all around you through how you do your work no matter what day it is. Mr. Costa notes that "One of the great difficulties in the world today is truth decay - many treat truth as a tradable commodity".

¹ Eugene Peterson. *The Message* (NavPress Publishing, 2006), 1434

Micah 6: 1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1: 18-31; Matthew 5: 1-12

The truth of Jesus Christ is not an alternative fact. It is not a tradable commodity. The truth is that Jesus became God incarnate to live among us, to teach us how to live and how to die. The truth is that Jesus died for us and showed us that the greatest truth of all is that love is everything. “You are blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are and your place in God’s family.”

We remember that love and commitment to us as God’s creation each week when we gather around the table to share the bread and the wine. “You are blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you will ever eat.” It is this meal and the community formed by gathering together that can change the world, one person at a time. We are not to remain within these walls, no matter how comforting this place can be. No matter how many tears and prayers these walls have seen and heard. We, like the disciples of Jesus are called to go forth to love and serve the Lord.

We serve the Lord best when we remember and then live the words of Micah, chapter 6:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice
And to love mercy
And to walk humbly with your God.

As we leave here in a few minutes to eat together and to review the work of this faith community over the last year, and even over the last 5 years, hear this prayer:

May God our Father bless you so that you can be a blessing to others.
May Christ bless you so that you can be healers of a world that is hurting.
May the Holy Spirit bless you so that you can spread the hope that only the triune God can inspire and give to this world.²

If we are to challenge the “alternative facts” and “fake news” that seems to be so prevalent today, we must live a life that witnesses to our faith in Jesus Christ. Not preaching in the secular work place but rather living and doing our work in ways that glorify God by doing justice, loving mercy and walking humbly with our God. **Amen.**

² Barbara Brown Taylor, ed. Feasting on the Word Worship Resources (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010)