

“Upside Down Living”

Wow Jesus, surely you were just kidding or teasing when you told your original disciples what we just read from the Gospel Lectionary Reading! Don't you agree? Weren't his words shocking? **If Jesus really meant what he said, then the whole world is turned upside down!** How does one live in such an upside down world?

Today's Reading was originally called “the Beatitudes” because, instead of translating the beginning of many of the statements in it with the word, “Happy”, as do our pew Bibles, the most familiar translations from our childhood and youth began those same statements with the word, “Blessed”. Why did Jesus claim the “poor” were “happy” or “blessed”? The other statements of who is “blessed” or “happy” are equally bewildering!

David Lose responded to Jesus' astounding teaching in our Scripture by writing, “In Luke they're just poor and hungry and hated – vagrant beggars who can't sustain themselves, can't provide for themselves or their families, are hard to look at, and are a drain on the system.”

Lose continued, “In short, they're losers. And yet Jesus calls them blessed. Why? ...”

Lose went on to explain, **“But no matter how hard we try, this passage – and all of Luke's Gospel, for that matter – makes one thing unavoidably clear: Jesus is for losers.”** “And the kingdom of God he proclaims is populated by losers. And unless we identify as a loser, we're likely not going to find ourselves anywhere near it ...” (“Losers” by David Lose on workingpreacher.org)

Being “a loser” is not a status people are rushing to get in line for! Being “poor” or “hungry” or mourning or oppressed – those conditions don't usually come to our minds when we are thinking about being “happy” or “blessed”. **However, living the upside down life Jesus was teaching and revealing might not be so undesirable, after we come to a more complete understanding of what he meant in our Scripture.** So, let's briefly examine this amazing Text.

Luke began our Reading, writing in **verse 20**, **“Jesus looked at his disciples and said, ‘Happy are you poor; the Kingdom of God is yours!’”** Some of us may remember this verse a little differently – Wasn't it “the poor in spirit”? Yes, the Gospel of Matthew has a slightly different version of the Beatitudes and saying “the poor in spirit” was one of those differences. That makes it sound so much more spiritual and acceptable to us, doesn't it? Frankly, I suspect Luke's version of the “poor” is more in line with what Jesus actually taught. The poor do not have any money or wealth competing for their attention over and against to our Divine Parent! Further, being “poor” during one's mortal life, leads to one being “happy” when poverty is endured because of the promise to experience the very valuable eternal life of the Kingdom of God!

In a like manner, Jesus also promised something wonderful for those who are hungry or mourning. Jesus said in **verse 21**, **“Happy are you who are hungry now; you will be filled! Happy are you who weep now; you will laugh!”** One biblical way of referring to living in the Fulfilled Kingdom of God is the Messianic Feast – the Great Banquet in Heaven. One will enjoy all the most delicious of foods, while not having to worry about the calories! The New Testament gospels report Jesus explained one's mortal death is not the end – for inheriting the Kingdom of God includes eternal life – the resurrection of the dead! All the Saints – all followers will share the life of God's Kingdom – even eternal life following the death of our mortal lives.

Jesus continued to tie the hardships his disciples or followers might be forced to experience with the eventual result of living in God's Fulfilled Kingdom, saying in **verses 22-23**, **“Happy are you when people hate you, reject you, insult you, and say that you are evil, all because of the Son of Man!”** Remember, “the Son of Man” was a title Jesus frequently used for himself. Jesus continued, **“Be glad when that happens and dance for joy, because a great reward is kept for you in heaven.”** Then, speaking about his adversaries – the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law, Jesus stated, **“For their ancestors did the very same things to the prophets.”**

Living the upside down way of life is especially “happy” because Jesus promised the result would be life in God’s Kingdom! Allow me to suggest, a synonym for the Kingdom of God is the New Faith Relationship with God, one another, and all people. So, happiness does not merely come with entering the Kingdom of God after our mortal lives come to an end. Instead, it begins with living the Kingdom of God – the New Faith Relationship with God in the present! **Therefore, you and I are “happy” as we experience, grow in, and deepen our New Faith Relationship with God – the partial experience of God’s Kingdom in the present.**

On the other hand, one will experience a “terrible” life eventually – during one’s mortal life because the choice is made to spurn God’s Kingdom and the New Faith Relationship with God and all people. Although they usually put on the show of happiness – those, who have become slaves to money, wealth, food, power, and the carefree life, they eventually experience great unhappiness, despair, and depression because they have separated themselves from the New Faith Relationship with God and all people – the Kingdom of God! Jesus point this out in verses 24-26, ***“But how terrible for you who are rich now; you have had your easy life! How terrible for you who are full now; you will go hungry! How terrible for you who laugh now; you will mourn and weep! How terrible when all people speak well of you; their ancestors said the very same things about the false prophets.”*** Cutting oneself off from being in the New Faith Relationship with God and everyone else leads to utter loneliness and meaninglessness.

So, what is this upside down living, which truly results in happiness? Jesus laid it out for us in the closing verses of our Scripture. He said in verses 27- 31, ***“But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who mistreat you.” “If anyone hits you on one cheek, let him hit the other one too; if someone takes your coat, let him have your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you for something, and when someone takes what is yours, do not ask for it back.”*** Jesus summed up the upside down life, ***“Do for others just what you want them to do for you.”***

Our Annual Consecrating Stewards Program is designed to help us grow in our New Faith Relationship with God, as well as, in our living out the New Life in Jesus Christ – the upside down life. **Using this program leads us to “Go, and do the same” like the Good Samaritan in Jesus’ parable. Thus, we are able to live the truly happy and upside down life from the world’s perspective because we are committed to the New Faith Relationship with God, one another, and with all people!** Enabled and empowered through this Consecrating Stewards Program to “Go, and do the same” we grow significantly in the use of our lives and resources, including money, for God’s Purposes – because of God’s Agape Love and Trustworthiness toward us. Through the Faith – Promise Process, of which we will be led next Sunday during Worship by our Guest Steward, Rev. Dr. Don Longbottom, the South Central Conference Minister, we seek to foster upside down living for ourselves and for others. We do that by making Faith – Promise Commitments of which the specific amounts and the specific identity of the individuals or households promising the giving of those amounts in 2017 are known only to themselves and to our Divine Parent. Further, our program has been taking place in the **spirit of Worship**, during the three Sundays leading up to the Consecration and Thanksgiving Sunday Worship Celebration next Sunday, November 13th. **This process and program focuses on the need for each of us to grow in and deepen our New Faith Relationships with God, one another, and all people by having a greater commitment to being more fruitful and agape loving in our support of our Divine Parent’s Purposes – the upside down life, through Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ.** We do that instead of emphasizing the church’s need for money. Through this program, we make sure we are agape loving – following the example of the Good Samaritan and Jesus Christ, instead of begging one another to support the church’s Budget. Indeed, the Board of Trustees will not even develop a proposed Budget, until all Faith – Promise Commitments are turned in. **Through this program we live the upside down life – the New Faith Relationship with God and all people as we “Go, and do the same.”** Amen.