

“Embody Beautiful Living”

In our search for happiness among the “stuff” of life, have we missed the point? **What difference would it make today to embody a love for justice and kindness in our everyday lives?**

Susan Blain agreed with the theme of our **“Who Are You”** Worship Series, when she asked, “Who is this Jesus, and who are we who follow him, and where is he leading?” Blain continued, “What kind of life will we have if we follow? And what is the Way along which he leads?” (“The Vision Beautiful” by Susan Blain posted on Weekly Seeds)

Jesus’ “Beatitudes” Teaching in his Sermon on the Mount reveals the “Way” he leads us to live our lives – to be “Who” he calls us to be. Dylan’s lectionary blog explained the radical nature of Jesus’ Beatitudes Teaching: “...he gathers in all of these people who are completely bereft and without honour in their culture’s eyes, and he gives them two gifts which more than compensate for their very real losses.

“1) Jesus gives them honour.

2) He makes them family.” “They are children of one Father, and that makes them brothers and sisters. They will never be bereft in a community that sees themselves as family, and that cares for one another in ways that show that they take that family relationship with utmost seriousness.” (“dylan’s lectionary blog” posted on sarahlaughed.net/lectionary)

It is very important for us to recognize and put into practice the example of what Jesus did as he taught “The Beatitudes” to those, who were normally excluded – the outcasts of Jewish Society. **Indeed, that is part of what it means to embody a love of justice and kindness!**

David Lose helped us to get our bearings on Jesus’ message of his “Beatitudes” teaching, when he said, “Reading them again this week, I began to wonder whether our difficulty with the Beatitudes isn’t symptomatic of a larger problem most of us have; namely, that we are far less eager to be blessed than God is to bless us. Or maybe ‘eager’ isn’t quite the right word.” **“Maybe it’s more that we have a hard time believing God wants to bless us in the first place.”** “It may be that our picture of God is distorted, that we can only imagine God as a stern, demanding law-giver, and so it seems out of character for God to bless without requirement.” Lose pointed out, “This isn’t the primary picture of God in the Bible, but it may be the one that we were taught and have a hard time letting go.”

Lose continued, “Or maybe it’s not that we don’t know God well enough to recognize God’s grace, maybe it’s that we know ourselves too well to feel worthy of that grace. After all, we are intimately familiar with our faults and limitations, our insecurities and failures.” **“And knowing ourselves this well – and knowing that God knows us even better! – we may find it hard to believe God loves us unconditionally.”** “Very little if anything in our world is unconditional. We’re used to paying for our mistakes, paving our own way, toeing the line and reaping the consequences when we don’t, and so it may not only be unexpected, but downright unsettling and nearly inconceivable to imagine that God behaves differently, showering us with blessing apart from anything we have done, earned, or deserve.”

Lose clarified, “But let’s be clear – or at least pay attention to the fact that Matthew is quite clear” – **“Jesus isn’t setting up conditions or terms but rather is just plain blessing people. All kinds of people. All kinds of down-and-out, extremely vulnerable, and at the bottom of the ladder people.”** “Why? To proclaim that God regularly shows up in mercy and blessing just where you least expect God to be – with the poor rather than the rich, those who are mourning rather than celebrating, the meek and the peacemakers rather than the strong and victorious. This is not where citizens of the ancient world look for God and, quite frankly, it’s not where citizens of our own world do either.” **“If God shows up here, Jesus is saying, blessing the weak and the vulnerable, then God will be everywhere, showering all creation and its inhabitants with blessing.”**

Lose went on to share the story, “When I was in graduate school, one of my teachers, Dr. Cleophus LaRue, would regularly address me as ‘Dr. Lose.’ Eventually it made me uncomfortable enough that I said to him, ‘But Dr. LaRue, I haven’t earned my doctorate yet. I don’t think you should call me that.’” **“Dr. Lose, he patiently responded, ‘in the African-American church we are not content to call you what you are, but instead call you what we believe you will be!’”** “Blessing. Unexpected, unsettling, nearly inconceivable, yet blessing nonetheless.” (“God Bless You” by David Lose posted on www.workingpreacher.org)

Ronnie McBrayer said, **“The Beatitudes are no spiritual ‘to do list’ to be attempted by eager, rule-keeping disciples. It is a spiritual ‘done’ list of the qualities God brings to bear in the people who follow Jesus.”** (Ronnie McBrayer, How Far Is Heaven?: Rediscovering the Kingdom of God in the Here and Now, 21st century) Although I agree with

McBrayer's insights, I suspect, when most people read or hear the "Beatitudes", they think of that Teaching in terms of "How can I do that?"

Alan Brehm revealed an interesting way to overcome that negative view of our condition. Brehm said, "A few years ago a film called '**The Secret**' was all the rage. It purported to reveal an ancient principle that had enabled people for generations to achieve wealth, success and happiness. That principle was called the '**Law of Attraction**': all you have to do to get everything you want in life is to simply believe that you will get it, envision your life with it, and speak about it as if it is a reality. This will then 'attract' what you want into your life." Brehm warned, "The more we hear of hucksters like this, the more we tend to be skeptical that there is any such thing as a 'secret to happiness.'" Brehm continued, "But I would say that there is a 'secret' to happiness that has been recognized throughout human history, and by most of the world's major religions. The true secret to happiness is not to hold tightly to whatever it is you want and come up with all kinds of schemes for getting it." Brehm concluded, "**The true secret to happiness is to let go what you want and accept life as it is. Call it what you will — trusting God, being enlightened, letting go — it is the true secret to happiness.**" ("The Secret of Happiness" by Alan Brehm posted on thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com)

"Trusting God" leads us to realize today's Scriptures are an affirmation God seeks to Bless each of us – every person! Further, we are assured our Divine Parent enables each of us to empower other persons, especially the weak and vulnerable in the world. For example, the Reading from the Prophet Micah is calling us to recognize God has empowered us "*to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God*".

Indeed, Jesus' Teaching of "The Beatitudes" in his Sermon on the Mount also encourages us to know we are **Blessed** and **God's Blessing is available to All People!** Adams' contemporary version of our Gospel Reading helps explain how God Seeks to Bless Us and All People in all our experiences. For example, recognizing our spiritual need results in the Blessing – "*the Holy Spirit becomes our spirit.*" Yes, even in grief, we are Blessed, because "*the joy of finding the tomb empty becomes our joy.*" When we want and seek justice, "*the justice we uphold becomes our own justice.*" The final example I will give from Adams' contemporary version is *Blessed are the merciful. For when the world is full of suffering, the mercy we show others becomes the mercy shown to us.*"

Yes, the Good News is we are Blessed and our embodying that beautiful life includes bringing "Blessing" to others, who need it in their lives. **Will you show who you are by welcoming God's Blessing and inviting others to experience it?** It is not a lost cause, for our two Scripture Readings demonstrate and testify to God's Blessing. It is also important for us to approach our being "Blessed" optimistically in this broken and corrupted world.

So, in the more positive and humorous vein, I close with **Rob Lacey's, "Who's Laughing"** version of "The Beatitudes". Lacey wrote, "I'll tell you who'll laugh last: the people who don't think too much of themselves, who know they're a mess - their ticket to heaven's already in the mail (first class).

Who'll be happy? The people who know about grief, who don't shove it behind the sofa, but face it - God is going to put an arm around them.

Who'll be content? The modest, gentle types who don't go round grabbing - they'll get given the world.

Who'll be laughing? The people who only want to do the right thing, like it's their food and drink - their "good news inbox" will be piled high.

Who'll be laughing? The people who don't hold grudges, who forgive and let live - they'll get treated likewise.

Who's laughing deep down already? The people who aren't polluted already with the stuff that co-opts the heart - they get to see God.

Who's laughing deep down? The people who stop fights and start friendships, who turn fists into high fives - they'll be known as God's children.

Who's laughing? The people who get slapped down for doing the right thing - they'll stroll right through the gates to a whole new world. (Who's Laughing by Rob Lacey) Amen.