

## The Beatitude Attitude (Part 2: An Honest Yes or No)

*Matthew 5:6-8*

Those of you that were here last week to hear Part 1 of my sermon series on the Beatitudes of Jesus may remember that I invited you to practice seeing yourselves as Blessed. I was not suggesting that we simply count our blessings, helpful though that may be. The point of the Beatitudes is not that we *have* blessings, but that we *are* blessed. I invited you to tell yourself, quietly, in the privacy of your own heart, “I’m blessed” morning, noon and night. The point is to practice seeing yourself in the light in which God sees you.

It is a beautiful thing, this journey into the heart of God. We do not travel alone; we do not travel without guidance. Along the way, teachers and companions appear unexpectedly. Waymarks turn us this way or that just at the moment we find ourselves completely lost, off all the familiar maps. With practice, we get used to being surprised – shocked, even, at where our path may take us. Moments of clarity and freedom and relief come to us and we begin to hunger and thirst for more.

There is no more telling shift along the way, than the shift that takes place in what we say “yes” to and what we say “no” to. I had a great conversation after church last Sunday in the “sermon-talk-back” with eight or nine of you, and one of the topics that came up was how some things, vitally important to us at one time in our lives, simply drop out. A job, a relationship, a stage in your life, once so important, one day you realize, “I’m done.” What was once a “yes” has become a “no.” On the other side of the ledger, some things that once paralyzed you with fear, or seemed inappropriate to the person you once thought you were, or maybe you just weren’t accustomed to yourself doing or being, now you say to yourself, “Hmmm. I wonder. Gulp. Here I go!” This human wisdom comes to most of us with age and experience.

Anybody out there at all familiar with “yes’s” and “no’s” that have changed on you?

But the Beatitudes push us beyond simple age and experience. They push us into honesty with ourselves. When Jesus talks about hunger and thirst for “righteousness” – he is talking about living out of an inner place of truthfulness. When Jesus is talking about “mercy”, he is talking about a capacity for self-reflection that redirects our own violence. When Jesus is talking about “purity of heart,” he is moving us to a new transparency where our outer actions visibly match our inner motivations.

If Jesus is our “shepherd,” then he is herding us into greener pastures we might never find on our own. Most of the people I know who long for this new honesty, this heart of God, will say that it comes with a price. The price is a letting go of many cherished expectations, roles and comforting illusions. (More on this in another sermon!) But the astonishing payoff, in the words of writer Jeff Foster, is the discovery of a vast, real love “that we do not generate with words or

deeds or even intentions, but we are continually embraced by, held in its vastness, no matter what we do, or do not.” This is the heart of God, which Jesus calls *the kingdom*.

I had a conversation recently with a woman who has in the past put remarkable energy into her church, leading in ways great and small over decades. She’s now in her early sixties and not as actively involved in the church as she once was. Her husband is seriously ill at home, and as she said, just now she doesn’t get out much “except to sweep snow off the driveway or dart to the grocery store.”

She told me the following story. She and her husband have a basket they keep on the counter in the kitchen by the coffee pot. It’s wicker and not very large. Beside it is one of those small sticky paper pads for lists and notes, and a pen. Their practice in years past has been, when they recognize something in their day that feels like a blessing, to write it down and put the piece of paper in the basket. At the end of the year, New Year’s Eve, they take the slips of paper out and read them to each other out loud. The blessings they count are often unexpected, forgotten, funny, poignant, and over the years, deeply honest, provoking revealing conversations.

This most recent New Year’s Eve she went to the basket and to her surprise, there was only one slip of paper from 2016. As she took it out to read it, she realized it was a blessing she herself had written. She had no recollection of writing it down or putting it in the basket. On the slip of paper were two words, in capital letters: THIS MOMENT.

And what did this one blessing, of THIS MOMENT mean to her? She said it meant that all things, all things, can be held in love. Even her limits, her uncertainty about the future, her growing awareness of the empty spaces in her days and in her heart, her husband slipping away – all can be held in love. All is held energetically in a vast field of love that embraces us no matter what we do -- or do not. This is her ‘yes.’

What is yours?

You know what I really believe? That faith is actually a dis-illusionment with our own expectations and dreams of what the world could or should offer, until there is nothing left but *what is*, to be loved. THIS MOMENT, she said, this can be loved. This moment contains all that is necessary for love.

*What would you say?* What do you hang on to and take with you into the empty and dark places? What embraces *you* no matter what?

Don't be afraid to be honest. You will not be abandoned. You will not be without guidance. Along the way you will say 'no' and lose nothing you really need. You will say 'yes' and gain more than you can now even ask or imagine.

Amen