

The Beatitude Attitude (Part 1: I'm Blessed)

Matthew 5:1-5

There's an edginess to Jesus' words in the Beatitudes that I hear and see now. It may be that I am older. I no longer think as I did when I was a child that the hurts of the world can be fixed with kisses and hugs. I no longer hold in my mind's eye a picture of Jesus sitting down on the Sermon Mount, telling the frightened, the grieving, the desperate and the hurt that it's all going to be all right.

Jesus doesn't actually say that, you see, that it's going to be all right. He says you are blessed right where you are – right in your experience – right now. Ouch! I don't remember *feeling blessed* when life didn't seem to be going my way. In my 66 years, I have experienced a fair amount of challenge, as, I am sure, you have. Not once do I remember saying, "Oh, goodie, the pain feels wonderful -- or this fear is just what I was looking for!"

How about you? Have you ever said anything like that to yourself about pain and fear? I didn't think so.

I remember being wheeled into surgery nearly 20 years ago, saying quietly to myself, "The Lord is my shepherd, the Lord is my shepherd....." That was my prayer. But was I saying, "O Thank you, God, for this cancer in my belly?" No. Not on your life.

So where is the blessing? What is Jesus talking about? Do we wait to see if things turn out all right in order to feel blessed?

Some of us – probably most of us – need to be pushed way out of our comfort zone to really hear what Jesus is saying.

My brother Tim has Parkinson's disease. We live on opposite coasts of the US and in many ways we couldn't be more different from one another. If I am Ying, Tim is Yang. If I am Democrat, he is Republican. If I am a New England Patriots fan, Tim is a Seattle Seahawks fan. Tim is a Bible-'inerrantist' Southern Baptist. I am a Bible 'prober and questioner' in the United Church of Christ. The list of safe topics of conversation at a family picnic are somewhat limited.

Yet we love each other a lot. I can't tell you how much I appreciate Tim's beautiful heart, even while his politics and his theology can drive me crazy. At a family picnic a couple years ago, we got to talking about his Parkinson's. He said he would never wish his Parkinson's on anyone. It's the hardest thing he's ever faced; it only gets worse and the worst thing is when he feels like he is losing his mind.

At the same time, he said, Parkinson's has been his companion for almost fifteen years and Parkinson's has taught him some pretty important lessons. Parkinson's has taught him he is not in control of his life. That is a simple truth. The prospect of his own end is pretty clear and his living now is more and more tightly defined by rituals such as trying to remember to take his medications. Tim the person is not in control. Parkinson's has taught him to love, he said, to love here and now and without hesitation. Any lesser form of love – the give-to-get form of love, the love that masks a desire to control, the love that denies and avoids what is real – Tim has no energy for any of that anymore. And so, Tim said, he would not give up his Parkinson's if it would mean giving up these lessons.

You're blessed, says Jesus, when you're at the end of your rope. You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. You're blessed when you are content with just who you are, no more, no less.

Here's my question for you this morning. Why do we have to be pushed to seek the heart of God? Why does it take so many of us the pain of disease or loss or disappointment – being pushed way out of our comfort zone, way past our hopes and dreams – to hunger to know more of God? I don't blame.....but I do wonder..... why do we normally settle for so much less?

We are invited any time into the heart of God. That's Jesus' point in the Beatitudes. We don't have to be big or important to be held, to be loved, to be blessed. We don't have to have a long future in front of us, or any future at all. We don't have to have long resumes or letters after our names. There doesn't have to be anybody left to sing our praises. There never was a border between us and God; no border police; no passport to get in or out.

You see, true awakening to the heart of God, goes way beyond the removal of symptoms, far deeper than cure or survival, illness, loss or death. "It's the discovery of who you really are, cancer or no cancer, diagnosis or not, failure or success or life long or short. It's remembering, a restoring of love, of connection, of peace at the center of things." (Adapted from Jeff Foster, *The Way of Rest*). True, it's often a rude awakening. Life happens, as the bumper sticker says. You don't stop *feeling* life as it flows through you. You hurt, you fear, you love, you may long. But you are no longer a victim, a statistic, or even a survivor. You no longer need a story to justify your existence. You *are* just blessed. *You are* the beating, conscious heart of God. It's who you are. It's why you are here, for now.

Years ago in seminary I knew a fellow student, a young pastor serving a small church in a tough part of New York City, who would always answer a greeting by saying, "I'm blessed." How are you? *I'm blessed*. How's it going? *I'm blessed*. What's happening? *I'm blessed*. (Actually, it got really annoying after a while). But I get it now. Below my story, below the waves of my daily existence, *I, too am blessed!* I'm not in charge of my life. But there is a wisdom at the heart of

my life that teaches me appreciation of what is. I am learning – still learning – to love here and now and without fear or hesitation. I'm not there yet. What a relief – I'm on my way!

With less of me, says Jesus, there's more room for God! More embrace, more trust in all that can't be seen. More seeing *from* the heart of God.

My friends, don't wait! You don't need a crisis to hear the invitation of the Beatitudes! Don't put it off! Why waste time and energy praying about "the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven" when you can *be* the kingdom right now?

Make room for God in your heart! Try an experiment this week. Say to yourself quietly on the inside: *I'm blessed*. Nobody else has to hear. In my waking, *I'm blessed*. In my living, *I'm blessed*. In my sleeping, *I'm blessed*. Say it until you annoy yourself! Consider *all* things. Say to them: *I'm blessed*. Come back next week and let me know how it went, to see yourself *as God sees you!*

My sermon next Sunday is called "An Honest Yes or No" as we take up the next three of Jesus' Beatitudes. The following Sunday we will take up the last three Beatitudes, and my sermon will be called, "Yikes!"

Amen