

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, January 29, 2023. "Who is to be honored in Jesus' Kingdom?"

Text: The beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-12 and Micah 6:6-8.

Our first lesson from the prophet Micah asks, "What does the Lord require of you?" I like it when the Bible is clear on how we are supposed to live out our faith.

I heard a story this week, it was from Ann Landers, about a church wanting to send a questionnaire to their members about what they want in a new minister. The writer said, "My mother hated questionnaires. As she entered her 89th year, her minister left our church at home, and the congregation was searching for a replacement. The Search Committee sent out a major questionnaire to each family to discern the qualities and skills they wanted in a new minister. The letter stated that an elder would call within some days to pick up the completed form. This placed my mother in an awkward position - not wanting to complete the questionnaire on the one hand and not wanting to appear rude to the elder on the other.

One evening the elder arrived at the door to collect the completed questionnaire. My mother politely told him, "I'm 89 and I don't do questionnaires. But I know what I want in a minister: someone who does justice, loves kindness and walks humbly with God. You can write that down!"

That is what God wants, not just of ordained ministers, but of us all."

As Christians, what does God require of us? After we know we are saved by grace through faith on account of Christ alone, how should we respond?

In Our Gospel today, we have the beloved beatitudes that begin Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7. I would recommend reading the Sermon on the Mount regularly. It is a summary of Jesus' teaching. It contains things like "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Or love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. It starts off, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Most of us, no matter what you are going through, good, bad, or otherwise, can say we are blessed. There are little blessings around us every day if we look, a bird in your bird feeder, the gift of daily bread, heat in your house or apartment, a job, someone who loves you, a good friend. Turn to a neighbor and share some of your blessings with each other.

Maybe you have heard the saying, “If you can’t fall asleep, instead of counting sheep, count your blessings.” You will surely fall asleep before exhausting your list of blessings.

In our household, Jeranna has been reading the Fancy Nancy children’s book series to Marcella. It takes big words in context and illustrations and explains them. The word “beatitude” is a fancy word originating from the Latin word beatus, meaning both "happy" and "blessed.”

The beatitudes are a reversal of the way the world works, and call to the church to follow suit. They give us our marching orders... like in Micah 6:8... to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. The ones Jesus is calling blessed in his kingdom aren’t the ones you typically would think are blessed like the rich, the powerful, the popular, and those who seemingly have it all together.

Instead, Jesus says these people are also blessed... those who are at the end of their rope, those who are mourning or grieving, those who are voiceless, those who hunger and thirst for justice.

Jesus, in Jesus fashion, is turning the world upside down in this sermon... which is a really a summary of his whole ministry and the cross.

In verses 3-6, Jesus calls the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, and those who hunger and thirst for justice in his kingdom the blessed ones. Another translation for blessed that I learned from my New Testament Greek Professor, Jim Bailey, is “How Honored”. For example, those who are mourning a loss this day, those who are hurting, in need of healing, are most to be honored in Jesus’ kingdom. You are to be lifted up. You will be comforted.

Then in verses 7-12 Jesus calls those who take social actions on his behalf and for the sake of the Gospel blessed, even if you will be persecuted, called names, etc.

So how do you relate to these Beatitudes. I am pretty sure that we can all relate to the idea of having a poverty in our Spirit. To feel like you are at the end of your rope. Eugene Peterson in the message translates this beatitude this way. You are blessed when you are at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

I also think we can relate to the idea of mourning a loss or experiencing grief. Jesus says you will be comforted. Comforted by the Christian community, by the word that offers hope, and by the sacraments that promise forgiveness and grace. This is a call to the church to honor those who are hurting in our midst. To pray for them, bring them food, visit them, send them cards, drive them to appointments. Sit with them. If you are grieving, you are honored in Jesus' kingdom.

Also, Jesus says the meek will inherit the earth. Peterson translates this beatitude, "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment you are proud owners of everything that can't be bought.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness which can be translated as "justice". Who is hungering for justice in our community, in our world right now? They are honored in Jesus' Kingdom.

Finally, the last 4 beatitudes are all about social action. Blessed are the merciful, for in being merciful, you will find mercy for yourself. Blessed are the peacemakers... not peace lovers. But people who act to make peace. Blessed are those who are persecuted for speaking Jesus' name... you may suffer on earth for it, but Jesus says, your reward is great in heaven.

The beatitudes are really about the Christian life and witness... our job description. It is everything we are called to do and be about after we say I believe. It is our response to God's saving love of Jesus on the cross and in the resurrection. How will you respond?