

“BLESSED”**Mountain Rise United Church of Christ****1-29-17****Greg Osterberg****Micah 6:6-8**

⁶ ‘With what shall I come before the Lord,
and bow myself before God on high?

Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings,
with calves a year old?

⁷ Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?

Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’

⁸ He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³ ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ ‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ ‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸ ‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

⁹ ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ ‘Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ ‘Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

[SLIDE: SIMON & GARFUNKLE - 'BLESSED ARE...' Audio]

Don't worry, 60's people — you are not having a 'flash-back'! Gotta love Simon & Garfunkel! Right?

This week we look closely at some of Jesus' most famous teachings:

The "Blessed are's..." (A.K.A. "the Beatitudes") words centering around being deeply, soul-satisfyingly happy!

"Blessed" in the original N.T. Greek this word was μακάριος (makarios) -- meaning, "deeply happy," "peacefully content," "Bless-ed!"

Who doesn't want to be *that kind* of happy?

Long before Jesus, Aristotle says happiness is the chief purpose of Human Life. But, Aristotle *also* points out a paradox: Happiness is one thing you cannot get by seeking it.

That seems contrary to our 'Declaration of Independence' listing pursuit of happiness as an "unalienable right" given to all human beings by their Creator. But, Jesus concurs with Aristotle, and amplifies the truth that *blessed* happiness is a God-given by-product of a living relationship with our Creator.

So...Jesus' outline for being deeply happy / blessed starts with another paradox:

(Let's say this together...)

[SLIDE: 'BLESSED ARE the POOR in SPIRIT...']

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

A good way of putting that is, "Blessed are those who *know their need* for God," as one Bible paraphrase says.

A group I respect - Alcoholics Anonymous - in their recovery 'Program' has,

Step #2: "We came to believe that a power greater than

ourselves could restore us to sanity."

Whole point: acknowledging one's need for God — as in "poor in spirit"!

Each of us could stand to start each day by telling God, "I *need* you."

By the way... Jesus' promised, "the kingdom of heaven," *isn't* some place in the "Here After," but a here and now connection, working in us to co-create God's beloved community for all!

[SLIDE: 'BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN...'] "Let's say it together..."

Next Paradox: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Wrote William Shakespeare, in Macbeth,

"Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak

knits up the o-er wrought heart and bids it break.”

Each of us has a well of emotion, one that’s meant to flow forth and *feel* this world around us in all its joy, *and* pain. This is an essential part of our Humanity. But, that reservoir is always in danger of freezing over! This is partly because tragedy and violence are becoming so familiar, piped in online & on TV - 24/7, so that we often feel a need to protect ourselves, to “harden our hearts.”

Some of us need help, even Divine help, to feel our own pain, each other’s pain this world’s pain — to feel it, yet without being crippled by it.

When we lose someone -- like a parent, a spouse, a child — the sorrow & loss colors all of life as we mourn, and to some degree ever afterward. As we let ourselves mourn our loss — we learn how precious each day, each person, is in life.

To be fully alive, we must feel the loss... enough to begin the healing.

Mourn, and we *will* be comforted.

[SLIDE: ‘BLESSED ARE THE MEEK...’] Next “BE-attitude”: Say it with me...

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth.” Sounds so naive!

Ha! “Blessed are the gentle.” How namby-pamby! So may say some of our power-drunk leaders. Yeah: What about Darwin? “Survival of the fittest?” “Might makes right!”

Many people admire bullies — especially if it’s *their* bully!

But, being “Gentle” does deal with use of power. All of us have more power than we know, so we must learn how to wield power *for good*. That is “Gentle.”

Jesus didn’t say, “Blessed are the wimps:”

Ghandi led his people to freedom from the British Empire, using ‘Soul-Force’ - that’s non-violent power!

Martin Luther King, Jr. and John Lewis, got bloodied in Selma crossing the bridge to freedom — courageous, non-violent, Soul- power!

Yes! “Blessed are the GENTLE, ...for they will inherit the Earth.”

But, unless *we step up* and get actively, courageously gentle, and start wielding ‘Soul Force’ against tyrants, there may be little of God’s Earth left to inherit!

[SLIDE: ‘BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HUNGER ...’] Say it with me!

“Blessed are they that hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.”

Oooh — “righteousness” -- there’s *that* word again! Please don’t confuse it with *self*-righteousness and public piety...)

[SLIDE: VIDEO - “The Church Lady” Dana Carvey] Self-righteousness personified!

Jesus points us to the inextricable link between making things “right” with people, and making things “right” with God. Micah’s, “Do justly, be kind, walk humbly,” is a How-To for making it right!

Ever notice how when a relationship is going wrong it colors most everything else in your life — until you “set it right?” All of us hunger, and thirst, for relationships set right.

Sometimes, that means we set limits in relationships, especially if abusive. Then, we trust God to do the rest — to “satisfy.”

[SLIDE: ‘BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL ...’] All together...

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.”

Blessed, happy, are people who show mercy. “Mercy,” is empathy in action!

Mercy is more than refraining from crushing your opponent.

It is harboring the refugee;

forgiving the debt of the destitute;

ensuring health care for people who can’t pay; or

relieving a care-giver or parent when their exhausted.

We each can “show mercy” somehow.

And, we can demand that, when possible, our government leaders show mercy too!

[SLIDE: ‘BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART’] All together...

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

The “Pure in Heart” makes us think of “morally pure” a “prude” maybe — but, definitely someone *boring!*

If that’s what it takes to “see God,” who needs it -- right?

Pure defined by Webster’s Dictionary, is “Free from mixture or pollution.”

“*Pure in heart*” is single-mindedness in pursuit of our Maker’s presence and purpose in our lives. It’s being present in The Now of life. That means not being a slave to the clock, or the smart-phone, FB, email, or latest TV/video offering!

God is present to us not in some anxious future, nor in the unchangeable past, but in our now. Pure in heart, means being alive to the gift of each moment; the blessing of each person.

To get there, make it a habit to pray, to meditate, to prepare yourself. Be fully present in each now, and God will be present to you.

[SLIDE: ‘BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS ...’] Say it...

“Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

Winning a war is usually easier than winning the peace!

Peace-Making is very different than *Peace-Keeping*!

There's a saying:

'If you want peace, work for justice.' Some of us have such bumper-stickers!

This is our calling -- it is the work of the 'children of God.'

You make peace by creating friendships, by building trust.

On a global scale (listen up gov. leaders!) you make peace by sharing wealth, not just extracting wealth; by imparting knowledge, not with-holding it. Not by threatening, but by befriending!

Last one, together...

[SLIDE: 'BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO ARE PERSECUTED...']

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Yes, you may not fit in if you take on these "attitudes." It costs something.

But... If you put all these behaviors together make them a habit, they will become an attitude of being — a "BE-ATTITUDE!"

People will think you are different, maybe a bit weird, even a bit subversive.

They may laugh at your apparent naivete, they may mock your apparent stupidity:

say cynically, "The World is just doesn't work that way !"

You can expect some persecution: that's how Jesus ends his Beatitudes.

When that happens, you'll know -- "the attitude" the "BE-attitude" is at work in you.

Just smile, for... "treasure awaits":

Happy, blessed, are those who have such a BE-attitude.
May we BE so bold!

Amen.