

Reflection for Epiphany IV Year A

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Micah 6:1-8, Psalm 15, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Matthew 5:1-12

Sunday, January 29th, 2023

One Sunday as they drove home from church, a little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, there's something about the preacher's message this morning that I don't understand." The mother said, "Oh? What is it?" The little girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are.

He said God is so big that He could hold the world in His hand. Is that true?" The mother replied, "Yes, that's true, honey." "But Mommy, he also said that God comes to live inside of us when we believe in Jesus as our Savior. Is that true, too?" Again, the mother assured the little girl that what the pastor had said was true. With a puzzled look on her face the little girl then asked, "If God is bigger than us and He lives in us, wouldn't He show through?" (Jerry Shirley, *When God Shows Through*, kayala.com/Stories for Sermons)



That is what the Beatitudes are about – God showing through. It has always been God's purpose that, when He entered our lives, He would be allowed to "show through" – that He would be visible in our attitudes and actions. Not that we would imitate Jesus, or try to do the things that Jesus would do, but that Jesus Himself would be allowed to live through us, to think and act like Him.

The text we call *The Beatitudes* in Matthew is the first major teaching that Jesus gives in his ministry, the Sermon on the Mount.

Picture the setting and listeners: So there they are, seated on a hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. The view is literally breathtaking. One can see the city of Tiberias, the River Jordan, and the Golan Heights. The people who have followed Jesus up the hill are poor, tired, worn out and oppressed under rule by the Roman Empire. They have obviously heard about Jesus and have come to hear what he has to say, and what he has to say is a blessing from God.

As Pastor Rick Morley describes it, "[Jesus] *begins this inaugural speech, this coming-out party, with a flood of blessings. He blesses the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted for doing the right thing, and those who are reviled and persecuted on his account.*" (Litany for the Citizens of Heaven – A Reflection on Matthew 5:1-12, October 24, 2011, rickmorley.com)

What Jesus says is shocking and counter-cultural; he certainly isn't trying to win favour with the religious, political, and rich leaders. So who is he blessing?

He is blessing his followers – Christians. As Pastor Morley continues, "*Jesus took this mass of people up on the mountain to give them a new way of life, a new direction for relating to others, what he himself was all about, what he wanted them and every person to be about, and a lifestyle that pleases God no end.*"

When we read the Beatitudes we often just think of them as good ideas.

But Jesus actually expects his followers – us – to live like this. The Beatitudes are not just something that are good in theory, they should be the markers for our life: who we are meant to be.

Christian author, Max Lucado, writes in his book, *Just Like Jesus* (1998) that God loves you just the way you are, but he refuses to leave you there. God's desire, his plan, his ultimate goal is to make you into the image of Christ. He wants you to be just like Jesus. Can you think of a better offer?

But how does this makeover occur? And why does it seem so slow? If God wants us to be just like Jesus, why do we still seem just the same? How can we be transformed? Max Lucado poses this question:

What if, for one day, Jesus were to become you?

Rev. Kraig Pullam offers up this response in his sermon, "*Holy Heart Check*" (February 19, 2014, *sermoncentral*):

"What if, for twenty-four hours, Jesus wakes up in your bed, walks in your shoes, lives in your house, and assumes your schedule and regular routine? Your boss becomes his boss, your family becomes his family, and your pains become his pains?

With one exception, nothing about your life changes. Your health doesn't change. Your circumstances don't change. Your financial condition doesn't change. Your schedule isn't altered. Your problems aren't solved.

Now to the exception: What if, for one day and one night, Jesus were to live YOUR life with HIS heart?

Your heart gets the day off, and your life is led by the heart of Christ. For one day His priorities govern your actions; His passions drive your decisions; and His love directs your behaviour. What would you be like?

Would people notice a change in you? Your family—would they see something new? Your coworkers—would they sense a difference? What about the less fortunate? Would you treat them the same? And your friends? Would they detect more joy in you? How about your enemies? Would they receive more mercy from Christ's heart than from yours?

And what about YOU? How would YOU feel?

What alterations would this transplant have upon your stress level? Your mood swings? Your temper? Would you sleep better? Would you see sunsets in a different way? Contemplate death differently? Better yet, would you still do what you are doing? Would you still do what you had planned to do for the next twenty-four hours? Would you still plan to do tonight what you did last night when nobody was looking? With Jesus taking over your heart, would anything change?"

Rev. Pullam concludes his sermon with appealing to your deepest spiritual core: "*Keep working on this for a moment, [with Jesus taking over your heart.]*"

Simply put, GOD wants you to “*think and act like Christ Jesus.*”

But it seems that, even though we want to please God, “our efforts are so inadequate, our motives often selfish, our faithfulness questionable. No matter how much we do, we fall so far short!”

Jesus didn’t say, “*Blessed are those who achieve their potential and never make a mistake.*” He said, “*Blessed are the poor in spirit...those who mourn...the meek.*”

We may have made [poor choices and mistakes in our lives which sometimes have resulted in very painful consequences], but we can still please God if [our attitude is right].

And that should motivate us whenever we get discouraged over our slow spiritual growth.”

(excerpts from Pleasing God, ODB, June 24, 1994)

God loves us just the way we are, but he refuses to leave us that way, so God wants us to be just like Jesus. He wants us to have a heart like His.

These are the characteristics of *The Beatitudes*, these blessings that allows God “to show through” and attitudes that help us Be.

Amen.

