

Feb 2, 2020
Sermon Delivered To Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Matthew 5:1-12
By Rev. Daniel Christian

Prayer Of Illumination

Jesus is the Message

Intro:

As a minister in Marin and Novato it is extremely common for me enter into a wide variety of theological and religious discussions! I often find myself all over the map with people. And vast array of opinions and beliefs are fascinating as well as unsustainable.

‘Believing Christians often get into this belief that “they are in” and everyone else is out. And at one level that simply doesn’t hold up. The idea that God’s grace is only for a limited few doesn’t hold our belief of the nature of God. I was born in Upland California and grew up Christian, but if I were born in Indonesia, I would probably be a Muslim. So surely God is at work in other places too? We can’t dismiss the rest of the world?

There is also the opposite mistake, and this is the one we run into on a daily basis here in Marin. It is popular to say religions are all the same- as if we could combine the great traditions into a melting pot. Christianity, Islam,

Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Scientology, Astrology, Pilates and Yoga say very different things. When religious tolerance turns its back on honest evaluation, beliefs and practices, it turns its back on commitment. Tolerance alone is nothing more than apathy. To say that all religious traditions are equal is another way of saying that no religious tradition makes a difference.’ (*Brett Younger, pg 295- Feasting on the Word Volume 4 year A*)

This is what makes our reading from Micah and Matthew come alive. They are both speaking to people who have a variety of belief systems and traditions. The prophet Micah wants us to love kindness.

‘The Hebrew word is “Hesed” which means “loving kindness.” We share this love with others.

Living in a diverse and multi religious world, we can walk humbly with God and we can hear God’s voice when we lean in and listen to Muslims, Jews and Buddhist, learning how other people makes sense of their lives. What it means to live by faith.

We are more faithful Christians, not by refuting and arguing with everything that isn't Christian, but if we can see truth and affirm it. We don't have to agree with everything. We can recognize that we can learn from others.

Krister Stendahl, the renowned Harvard Theologian called it, "Holy Envy". When we learn from another tradition and we see God there too!

As Christians we can stand tall and know that we have something to offer too!

We won't lose our way if listen to others. Quite the opposite, we become more mature Christians when see that the great religions struggle with things that matter.

Could it be that whether we have the right answer is less important to God, than whether we show compassion?" (*Brett Younger, pg 295- Feasting on the Word Volume 4 year A*)

And this is what Micah and Jesus are both talking about.

The “Sermon on the Mount” is perhaps one of the best-known passages in The New Testament.

Crowds have gathered to hear this man Jesus that they keep hearing about. These people are spiritually hungry and seeking **renewal** and **mercy** in their life. They come from all over the religious map. Jews, gentiles, pagans and the list goes on.

Jesus, instead of imposing **insistent** intellectual doctrine and dogma on people that further reduces and isolates them, Jesus brings **freshness** and **fragrance** to those who hunger and thirst for God.

Jesus begins the sermon with one of the “Beatitudes”; Latin for Blessing. Jesus is preaching to fellow Jews and Gentiles. He isn’t preaching about “Right Rules.” Instead, they want to know “where and how is the God of creation, the God of Abraham and Moses guiding them?” The people who gather are thirsting to follow God, and walk a path that is in step with God’s. Jesus has an unexpected message, a message so fresh it is like oxygen. Jesus doesn’t say “shame on you”, then role out a list of laws to beat them over the head with, no, he says something entirely different:

The Message

“You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

⁴ *“You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.*

⁵ *“You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.*

⁶ *“You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.*

⁷ *“You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.*

⁸ *“You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.*

⁹ *“You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.*

¹⁰ *“You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.”*

In the very next breath he says, whoever you are: “YOU are light of the world”. The **mournful**, the **hungry**, the **merciful**, the **peacemakers**, “you are the light of the world”.

Much of the power of this text depends where you sit in life. I preached on this text a few times over the years. I went back and reread those sermons from years gone by and remembered vividly where I was in my life, and what was happening. I remember every **season of joy**, **heartbreak**, **mourning** and **renewal** that I was living when this text came up.

Jesus says, Be the light of God. Wherever you sit during the Sermon on the Mount, “Be The Light Of God”. *You have the power within you to be the light of God when you are at the end of your rope. When you are content with who you are on the inside.* You, and you and you and me! Not someone else, but you. Let the light of God within you and around you, light the path not just for you, but for another.

When Jesus gives his Sermon On The Mount he isn't the
MESSENGER, HE IS THE MESSAGE! He is the word of God made flesh!
The path to holiness is “ *blessed when you get your inside world—your
mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.*

⁹ “*You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of
compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your
place in God's family.*

The Sermon on the Mount when Jesus preaches “blessed are those
who mourn” sounds different if you have smooth sailing in life or if you are
in deep grief over the loss of someone you love. You have different ears if
you are **sick, vibrant, grief** stricken or **glad of heart**. It sounds different if
you are **up front** and listening to those words of Christ and hungering and
hanging on every word, or **far in the back** and thinking, “this message must
be for other people”.

“Blessed are those who mourn” sounds different if you **content in your life** or if you live in the jaws of anxiety, fear, worry and grief over economic struggles, family, aging, sickness etc.

Jesus is preaching and saying in a sense, if you hunger and thirst, if your Spiritual bones are poking through the clothes hanging off your body, if your eyes are soaked with tears, the light of God illuminates your darkness; and then Christ says, “your **life**, your **tears**, your **pain**, your **power**, your **influence**, your **wealth** are pathways to holiness”.

My life, all of it, my mourning and grief, can light a path for another?
My life can bring the light of Christ to another? My life, my tears are a witness that God loves me and there is nothing I can do about it? Jesus says, YES!

The common practice of Judiasm at the time had become “a religious practice of tedious rules”. Christianity has done a pretty good job at this too!
Jesus says God’s message is far more important and life-saving than the

insistent rules that are being applied today. “The message of God is healing and here it is folks!”

Jesus says, *Be the light of God*. Wherever you sit during the Sermon on the Mount, “*Be The Light Of God*”. “If you are **smart, rich, unemployed, sick, educated, grief stricken**”; “Be the Light of God”. You, and you and you and me! Not someone else, but you. Let the light of God within you and around you, light the path not just for you, but for another. This is a **provocative and radical** statement! In a world and practice that had been reduced to tedious rules.

What makes “mourning” a pathway to holiness so radical is that if we have any inclination of living out our faith in some **secret, distant, personal** and far away corner of our life, “I keep my faith and my tears to myself”, Jesus is saying, “I am asking you to do more than that.”

Sharing the light of God with another... that’s what the disciples did when they cast aside their nets and followed Jesus.

Jesus says blessed are the *poor in spirit*...this is a blessing? Blessed are the **meek**. Gentleness is blessing huh? Blessed are **those who mourn**. Heartache and grief are Holy? Then Christ takes a breath and the next words are, "*You are light of the world*, and let your light shine before others so that they may see that your good works give glory to God". (*Matt 5: 14-16*)

A pastor friend of mine, while giving me pastoral care and counseling said, "tears are in themselves a prayer, they are an expression from deep within, from our hurt, our anguish and we can't even put words around those feelings, but our tears are in and of themselves a voice, a prayer, it is speaking out and crying out to God."

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is the secret king of Israel. When Jesus gives his Sermon On The Mount he is not offering practical advice for **good clean living**. He isn't "*helping people get spiritual*", *he isn't a wisdom teacher*. When Jesus preaches, he is sharing the word of God.

When our life is filled with worry, pain, or anxiety, you don't have to be far from God, to the contrary, you have a bridge with an open and receptive heart to let the light of God shine upon you.

The Sermon on the Mount is not about being **perfect**. It is not some **impossible ideal** we will never achieve. The Sermon on the Mount is not an **ethical** understanding of life.

The light of the world contained in Christ's sermon says to all who listen, no matter what religious tradition you have been introduced to, no matter where you sit in life, **the top**, the **bottom**, the **front**, the **back**, or the **middle** if you have a **graduate degree** or working to be the **first** in your **family** to **graduate high school**, if you are triathlete, or you have cancer, *“you are forgiven, you are a child of God, you belong to God's kingdom, the light of God has risen over your life, the Holy Light that shines in the darkness is part of you, you are a redeemed child of God, and new life is growing. That is what the Sermon On The Mount is all about”*. (Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus and the Message of the New Testament*, pg. 36)

Your mourning, your tears, your grief, your brokenheartedness, your feeling as if your life is lived in shared and fragments, your tears become the very cracks to let the light of God in! The light of God can enter your darkness and now you are forever changed from the inside out.

Your **wounds, failures, setbacks, challenges, joys, success**, become gifts to know God. Your darkness is the birthplace for the light of God. Wherever you sit during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is saying “don’t just refrain from doing someone else harm”, Jesus asks you to more that, “share the gift of God with someone else in this world, and be a light in another’s darkness”. My friends this is what Jesus’ message is all about!

May It Be So For You, and Also For Me.

SILENT PRAYER.