



THE BEATITUDES

Who Are You? Series
Rev. Sue Williams, Pastor

Judging by the wealth of Chiefs regalia and the color red – Chiefs red – I can safely say that all of us here today are fairly certain that when the Chiefs win the Super Bowl today we will feel happy and blessed.

However, we're also fairly certain that Jesus wasn't talking about that kind of blessedness or happiness.

The literal translation of the word we translate as happy or blessed is "O, the blessedness of ..."

This blessedness describes a happiness that comes from a right relationship with God, rather than emotional bliss or good fortune. Like the bliss of The Chiefs winning the Super Bowl.

When I hear the Beatitudes, it's hard for me not to hear Jesus as stating the terms under which I might be blessed. For instance, when I hear "Blessed are the pure in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," I tend to think, "Am I pure enough in spirit?" or "I should try to be more pure in spirit." Or, when I hear "blessed are the peacemakers...", I think, "Yes, I really should be more committed to making peace."

At least with "blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted," I have the assurance of knowing that on those occasions when I am mourning, I will be comforted. But, to be perfectly honest that's relatively small comfort because the truth is I don't want to mourn, and hearing this beatitude doesn't make me any more eager for additional mourning. (Ditto for being persecuted!)

Maybe this tendency is peculiar to me, but I don't think so. Reading them again this week, I began to wonder why these beautiful words make me squirm.

I think we all tend to fall into thinking that Jesus is setting up conditions for us to meet in order to be happy or blessed.

Maybe it's because we have a hard time believing God wants to bless us in the first place. We know ourselves all too well to feel worthy of that grace. After all, we are intimately familiar with our faults and limitations, our insecurities and failures. And knowing ourselves this well — and knowing that God knows us even better! — we may find it hard to believe God loves us unconditionally.

Very little if anything in our world is unconditional. We're used to paying for our mistakes, paving our own way, toeing the line and reaping the consequences when we don't, and it's not only unexpected, but downright unsettling and nearly inconceivable to imagine that God behaves differently, showering us with blessing apart from anything we have done, earned, or deserve.

But let's be clear -- or at least pay attention to the fact that Matthew is quite clear — Jesus isn't set up conditions or terms but rather is just plain blessing people. All kinds of people. All kinds of down-and-out, extremely vulnerable, and at the bottom of the ladder people.

Why? To proclaim that God regularly shows up in mercy and blessing just where you least expect God to be -- with the poor rather than the rich, those who are mourning rather than celebrating, the meek and the peacemakers rather than the strong and victorious.

This is not where citizens of the ancient world look for God and, quite frankly, it's not where citizens of our own world do either. If God shows up here, Jesus is saying, blessing the weak and the vulnerable, then God will be everywhere, showering all creation and its inhabitants with blessing.

David Lose, former president of Lutheran Theological Seminary and current

pastor of Mt. Olivet Lutheran Church in Minneapolis tells this story

When I was in graduate school, one of my teachers, Dr. Cleophus LaRue, would regularly address me as "Dr. Lose." Eventually it made me uncomfortable enough that I said to him, "But Dr. LaRue, I haven't earned my doctorate yet. I don't think you should call me that." "Dr. Lose," he patiently responded, "in the African-American church we are not content to call you what you are, but instead call you what we believe you will be!"

Blessing. Unexpected, unsettling, nearly inconceivable, yet blessing, nonetheless.

I want each of you and me to hear – really hear that Jesus isn't setting up conditions. Instead Jesus is simply blessing us for living into the realm of God that he brings.

Rob Lacey is the author of a piece that I hope reminds of us Jesus blessing to us. He pretty much sums up who we are at St. John's Chapel and who we are as humans. Lacey calls it "Who's Laughing"

I'll tell you who'll laugh last: the people who don't think too much of themselves, who know they're a mess - their ticket to heaven's already in the mail (first class).

Who'll be happy? The people who know about grief, who don't shove it behind the sofa, but face it - God is going to put an arm around them.

Who'll be content? The modest, gentle types who don't go round grabbing - they'll get given the world.

Who'll be laughing? The people who only want to do the right thing, like its their food and drink - their "good news inbox" will be piled high.

Who'll be laughing? The people who don't hold grudges, who forgive and let live - they'll get treated likewise.

Who's laughing deep down already? The people who aren't polluted already with the stuff that co-opts the heart - they get to see God.

Who's laughing deep down? The people who stop fights and start friendships, who turn fists into high fives - they'll be known as God's children.

Who's laughing? The people who get slapped down for doing the right thing - they'll stroll right through the gates to a whole new world.

O the blessedness of being a child of God. O the blessedness of following Jesus who ate with sinners, refused to engage seeking fame Jesus – who did not hold grudges and who often was slapped down for doing the right thing.

Jesus blesses us – just as he did the multitude on the side of that mountain. Jesus blesses us for being willing to take the risk of living into the emerging realm of God.

Remember Dr. LaRue's words — "we are not content to call you what you are, but instead call you what we believe you will be!"

When we see ourselves as blessed we will become a blessing in the world.

Amen.

