

Daily Discipleship

Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany (A) – Matthew 5:1-12

Discipleship: *Following the Master Teacher*

Focus Question: *What is Jesus trying to teach me today?*

word of life

“When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them . . .” Matthew 5:1-2 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 5: 1-12

The Gospel of Matthew is a teaching gospel with Jesus serving as the master teacher. His primarily Jewish audience is learning from Jesus what it means to follow him and become his disciple.

The Gospel of Matthew includes five lengthy discourses. Each discourse ends with the words, “when Jesus had finished . . .” (Matthew 7:28, 11:1, 13:53, 19:1, 26:1 NRSV) Biblical scholars make comparisons between these discourses and the five books of the Torah.

The first of the five speeches of Jesus is found in Matthew 5:1-7:28. Since Jesus is teaching from the mountain (Matthew 5:1), it is often called the Sermon on the Mount. Included in this discourse is a series of tips on how to live life. The next five lessons of the lectionary are all found in the Sermon on the Mount. If you have time, read through the entire Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1-7:28).

1. *Imagine listening to Jesus teach. What would that have been like?*
2. *When you think of the teachings of Jesus, what first comes to mind?*

Many associate Jesus with parables and his stories. But Jesus also taught practical tips of life, often adding a new perspective. Not all his teachings are predictable or easily grasped. This is true with the Beatitudes, a series of blessings.

Read through Matthew 5:1-12 again. This time pause after reading each blessing and name someone you personally know who fits that description. (Try to think of someone new for each of the beatitudes.) As you do this exercise, consider the following questions:

3. *How difficult or easy is it to think of someone who is described by each of the beatitudes?*
4. *What general observations might you make about all those individuals named?*

Except for the final blessing, all the beatitudes are right now – this day. The blessings are to be experienced on this side of the grave, not later in heaven.

5. *Which of the beatitudes have you personally experienced?*
6. *Which if any of the beatitudes do you find confusing? How so?*
7. *Which beatitudes would you like further explained by Jesus?*

The beatitudes encourage believers to turn to God for guidance on living in radical, new ways. Being meek, mournful, and hungry are not words usually used to describe people on the fast track of success. Nevertheless, God chooses to bless. God chooses to turn the world upside down, bringing joy from tears and hope from despair. God blesses the unexpected. That’s just the way God operates.

word among us

Andy was quite anxious about beginning kindergarten. His parents and grandparents had been trying to prepare him for the first day. They talked about new friends, learning new things, and recess. Andy was not interested in any aspect of the venture. Finally, he agreed to attend the opening day.

Once his first (and only) day at school was over, Andy announced he need not return. He already knew everything the teacher taught. Why bother? What more could he possibly learn?

1. *What would you say to Andy?*
2. *How did Andy's attitude block him from learning at kindergarten?*

We might find ourselves chuckling at the idea of knowing everything by kindergarten. Andy simply did not realize all that was before him.

Unfortunately, we as Christians sometimes sound just like Andy. We get in a rut and think we have learned everything there is to know about following Jesus. But even if we have grown up in the church and currently attend worship as well as Sunday School classes regularly, there is still much to learn.

3. *What attitudes block Christians from Jesus?*
4. *What attitudes do you recommend to someone who wants to learn from Jesus?*

Disciples of Jesus are intended to be life-long learners, allowing God to shape and reshape our lives. Each day becomes an opportunity to integrate the teachings of Jesus into daily life. God's Spirit nudges and invites us to see things from God's perspective. The beatitudes are an example of teachings by Jesus which have the potential of turning our world upside down.

The beatitudes are a vision of what happens when the ethic of love becomes the principle of living. It is a radical way to live. As we reflect on the beatitudes, it is easy to see how it might take a lifetime to understand the beatitudes, let alone live them.

5. *How does one strive in daily life for humility, meekness, and purity of heart?*
6. *What is so radical about the beatitudes?*

Some have dissected the word *beatitude* into the words: *be an attitude*. Our daily attitudes are to be humility, meekness, and purity of heart. We are to hunger for God and seek peace fervently.

7. *What does it mean for you to "be an attitude" of blessing?*
8. *Which beatitude do you hope to remember and embrace during the coming year?*

Prayer

Gracious God, help us to live the beatitudes in daily life. Give us courage to seek you and trust in your blessings. Amen

Dig Deeper

Micah 6:1-8

last word

Select a beatitude and
adopt it as your
personal
New Year's resolution.



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Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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