

Daily Discipleship

November 1, All Saints Day (A) – Matthew 5:1-12

The Challenge of Discipleship: *Blessed Living*

Focus Question: *What is one way God blessed you during the past week?*

word of life

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Matthew 5:4 (NRSV)

Read Matthew 5:1-12

This text is part of the Sermon on the Mount and is the first of five lengthy speeches given by Jesus in the gospel of Matthew. Actually, this sermon is a compilation of many of the teachings of Jesus and includes the Lord’s Prayer. The Sermon on the Mount is sometimes referred to as the Christian Magna Carta. (If you have time, skim through the entire Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5:1-7:29.)

The first verses of the Sermon on the Mount focus on the *Beatitudes*, a type of blessing. Yet, these are not typical blessings as found in the psalms. Jesus adds a unique twist by lifting up attitudes not typically associated with *blessing*. This is one of many times Jesus adds new meaning to familiar teachings.

The Greek word which is often translated *blessed* can also be translated *happy* or *congratulations*. Yet those words prove confusing. We think of being happy when good things happen to us. People congratulate us on our positive fortune. A quick glance at the Beatitudes reveals something else. Jesus is not offering a blessing because of good fortune. Instead, Jesus flips everything upside down and blesses those who are emptied.

1. *What pattern do you observe in the Beatitudes?*

The timing of the blessing in these teachings is unclear. Will the blessings be known now or in the future eternal life? When will the meek inherit the earth? In the future? When will the pure in heart see God? All the blessings are written in the present tense, as in today.

2. *Are people who meet the description of the Beatitudes blessed today or the future?*

On the one hand, we could make a case for those who are poor in spirit seeing God in this lifetime. As these individuals acknowledge their dependence on God, they become open to the presence of God and God’s reign. They experience God’s reign this day.

Likewise, those who mourn the loss of a loved one, passing health, or tragedies faced by others, can know the present comfort provided by a loving God and a compassionate Christian community. This comfort can be experienced today – not just in the next life. Yet those who mourn still grieve, despite the comfort extended to them from others. They still anticipate a promised comfort yet to come.

3. *What has been your experience of being blessed as described in the Beatitudes?*

Sound confusing? It is. Like so many of the teachings of Jesus, the Beatitudes echo the paradox of the Christian faith. Blessings are experienced fully by those who, at first glance, do not seem blessed at all. It is to those who are emptied and who recognize a need for God that the true blessings are given.

4. *How have you already experienced the blessing of the Beatitudes? How do you wait?*

word *among us*

His death came unexpectedly. What could be said? This pillar of the congregation ushered at Sunday worship, greeting each person with his wide grin. On Tuesday he died of a heart attack. His wife, family, friends, and the congregation were in shock.

On a gray Friday afternoon in November, his family, friends, and beloved congregation gathered to remember. They remembered how much he loved Easter. They remembered how loudly he would sing the Easter hymns, his raspy, off-key voice clearly heard lofting over the rest, proclaiming the Easter message he fully believed: “Christ is risen! Alleluia!”

They sang with equal strength and gusto. What other hymns would be sung than these? Yet even as their voices proclaimed the joy of the resurrection, their tears streamed down their faces. Each mourned the death of this dear, wonderful man, even as they rejoiced at the promise of resurrection. True they felt comfort, but they also felt deep sorrow.

1. *How have you experienced comfort at times of grief?*
2. *Does comfort come once and for all or is it a gradual process? Describe.*
3. *What would you say to the grieving widow?*
4. *How would you respond at the time of grief if someone said, “You are so blessed”?*
5. *Does sorrow or suffering bring blessing? How so?*

Each year the assigned gospel reading for All Saints Sunday includes the Beatitude, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4) As Christians we do not pretend as if death has no sting. Instead we clearly speak of the pain of the grave. We give thanks to God for defeating death through Jesus Christ and promising eternal life. Consequently, we can sing Easter hymns on grim, dark days of winter. There is more to the story than the grave.

6. *Why can a Christian sing an Easter hymn at a funeral?*
7. *What message does that give to non-Christians who might attend the funeral?*

Our challenge as disciples of Jesus is to live in the reality of day-to-day hurts and pains, while trusting in his promises for the future. We experience a foretaste of the promises of the Beatitudes now while at the same time living with not-yet-here fulfillment of the promises yet to come. If that sounds like a paradox, it is. But that is the life of the disciple.

8. *How can you live a blessed life?*
9. *How can you be a blessing to others?*
10. *What makes the Beatitudes so challenging for modern-day disciples?*

Prayer

God of mercy, comfort the places in my life where I grieve.

Dig Deeper

Romans 6: 4-11

last word

This week,
take time to extend comfort
to another person
in sorrow.



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Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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