

“Way To Be!”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
February 5, 2017**

Old Testament lesson: Psalm 15

New Testament lesson: Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowd, he went up the mountain, sat down, and to those who gathered around, he spoke and taught, so that they might follow him and find a new way of life, a more blessed life closer to God.

On Wednesday at LOGOS, the students in the Bible class I teach with Pam Long made a commercial inviting people to be closer to God, as servants of the Lord. Let see that video now ... That was Caitlyn Arnold, Andrew Banks, and Colton Krause, with Alexandra Arnold as the director.

In the video, Caitlyn tells Colton that God would see him as faithful and he could bring justice to the world and help people, and Colton sees a whole new pathway ahead of him. But how easy is it to be so faithful as to bring justice ? How easy is it to go out of your way to help people? As Christians, we do it-or try to-but it's not easy.

It takes a certain type of person. And yet Jesus tells us that all people – whether you are rich or poor, powerful or ordinary – all people can and should be God's servants, working toward justice. How can those with little power and influence make a difference? How can those with all the power in the world stay true to their calling, when wealth and power are so tempting (and easy) to abuse?

Jesus tells us how to be, in the beatitudes, during his Sermon on the Mount. He says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit ... those who mourn..., (and those who are) meek.” These are the first three beatitudes or blessings.

Interestingly, the first three beatitudes seem to be summed up by the fourth: “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” I mean, people who are poor in spirit, who mourn a loss, and are meek are people who hunger and thirst after that which only God can provide – spiritual sustenance, peace and comfort amid loss, and true wisdom and knowledge for those who are meek or open enough to receive and accept divine truth, God's righteousness

Or, looking at it from the other side, those who are full of themselves spiritually, who have so much that they never mourn the loss of anything, and who boast of their own knowledge, these people are by definition not open to God or anyone else.

Such people may look to be blessed on the outside – particularly if they are rich, successful and seemingly happy – but inside they are empty. And not only that, they are so full of themselves that there's no room for God.

Sadly, I think we can all relate to that to some extent. Granted, few of us are on the extreme of such self-absorption, but each of us have attitudes, beliefs and activities in our lives that crowd God out.

What Jesus is teaching in the first three beatitudes is that those who grow in their relationship to God and as servants of the Lord aren't afraid to be a little hungry and thirsty. And that doesn't mean being hungry and thirsty for our own wants and desires, but rather hungry and thirsty for what God knows is good for us, or as Matthew puts it, for God's righteousness.

What this means is we can't let money be the most important thing in life; God will provide. We can't let getting our way be most important; God's will be done, God will work things out for the best. We can't let being the most popular or successful person sidetrack us from who God is calling us to be – someone who is open to the leading of the Spirit (poor in spirit), someone who knows what it is to go without and be OK with it (who mourns or experiences want and loss), and someone who is open to learning new things (someone who is meek), willing to look from the other person's perspective.

Next Jesus says, "Blessed are the merciful..., the pure in heart..., and the peacemakers. Looking at those beatitudes next to the first three – the poor in spirit, those who mourn and the meek – what we're looking at in the first list is those who are powerless – the poor, the lost and the lowly – AND in the second list those who are powerful by worldly standards – those who have the power or authority to be merciful, those who claim the certainty of their convictions who are (pure in their own heart, at least) and those who have influence over war and peace. Both ways of being are useful and powerful in bringing about God's justice, God's righteousness.

It doesn't matter whether or not you have influence over some situation; there is always a way to respond in keeping with God's will, God's righteousness, God's desire for us to live blessed lives, both for our sake AND for the sake of others.

If you have the power in a given situation, be merciful, set your heart on God, and seek a peaceable, loving way forward. And if you don't have the power – if circumstances are holding you down – turn your spirit toward God, let God comfort you, open yourself to the greater wisdom of God.

That's the proper way to be in any situation, for both those who are in power and those who are powerless by comparison.

Jesus includes both the powerful and the powerless in his list of blessings or beatitudes. Both can be confident and take comfort in knowing that God is in control.

We live in uncertain times. Many in our community and throughout the world are feeling powerless. But there is a place for them – a place of safety, of provision, of comfort. And that place is with the Lord, and are calling is to make way for it.

If you feel empty inside, at a loss, or uncertain about the future, turn to the Lord – in scripture, through prayer, or by reaching out to me or someone else you can trust. With God, there is always a way forward, always a right choice. The beatitudes are just that – they're the way to be, the attitudes to have. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

God of grace, we come together in prayer seeking a more faithful walk alongside Jesus amid a world of uncertainty and temptation.

Grant us the patience to return anger with kindness, the grace to replace self-indulgence with self-giving;

When we are right at the expense of another's feelings, grant us the strength to be humble instead of arrogant;

When we are tempted to live out our lives at a hectic pace following only our own agenda, grant us the wisdom to slow down and take time to hear what you would have us do;

When we are tempted to take the easy way out ... to put desire over discipline ... to let someone else take a stand for peace and justice, remind us that the easy way is not always the right way in the kingdom of God;

Prayer requests: And for those whose way is made all the harder due to illness, financial struggle, or worldly disregard, send your healing touch, your provision of plenty, and your care and compassion.

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;
And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil,
For thine is the Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory, forever. Amen.**