

Rev. Estelle Margarones, 1/27/19, First Parish, Gospel of Matthew 5:1-16

Our passage begins at a time when Jesus has gained some popularity. He's got quite a following and he's been preaching, teaching, and healing throughout the region. Now we find him offering what we call 'the sermon on the mount'. In the Bible, mountaintops are always associated with God.

We call this series of couplets "The Beatitudes". Beatitude means 'supreme blessing'. Today when we speak of blessings, we're talking about things for which we're grateful. Oftentimes, they're things we've been given by the grace of God. Today when a pastor blesses something, you may understand that we're asking God's divine favor upon it. But the 'blessed' of the gospel of Matthew means means 'happy'. In fact, some Bibles say "Happy are the meek...happy are those who mourn...happy are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice".

You might be thinking, "happy"?! Why? Most of these circumstances sound absolutely awful. The blessing is connected to the second part of the phrase. Because you will inherit the earth, because you will be comforted, because you will receive the kingdom of God. Because you will not be in these circumstances forever. There is hope. Because God cares. The word the Bible uses is Makarios (Ma-cah-ree-oss) and it means happy or content despite circumstances because you have God's favor.

It may be helpful for you to consider the Beatitudes as Be Attitudes. What will your attitude be even when things are difficult? Even when you're grieving that things are not what you would wish? Even when you're feeling helpless or as though you don't have enough time, knowledge, money, or connections to change circumstances. The beatitudes remind us that no matter where we are or what we're facing, we can have hope even in the midst of messiness.

Jesus doesn't just implore us to have personal hope, he also encourages us to bring hope to one another. "You are the salt of the earth." Salt is a preserver. It will keep something fresh when it would otherwise decompose. Imagine that! It can keep things stable when they would otherwise fall apart. Salt also gives flavor and makes things more palatable. It only loses its saltiness when it's diluted.

"You are the light of the world." Jesus doesn't say that when you do x, you are the light of the world. Or if you do y, you'll be the light of the world. He says you are the light. He has just enlightened everyone around him and they now know that they're blessed by God. Loved. Seen. They have seen the light so they

can now go be light bearers in the world. That's true of us, too. We've been enlightened and we can share our understanding with others. When someone is experiencing dark times, you can share your light. St. Francis of Assisi said, "All the darkness in the world cannot extinguish the light of a single candle.

Don't hide your light. Let it shine for others. The way you shine it will be different from the way I shine it and the way that your friends and family shine it. It's your little light. And when a lot of little lights come together, you can light up a whole community.

This passage would encourages us have faith in difficult circumstances and also have us bring hope to others. The story I'm about to share is true (though I've changed the name). I'm sharing it with permission.

I was at Mass General Hospital. It was a bitterly cold day. The kind of day where you just can't get warm. As I approached, I noticed that even though the hospital was stifling, Patti pulled her coat tightly around her. She sat. Just staring forward. When I greeted her, her eyes just welled up with tears and I hugged her and she held on to me tightly, as though she couldn't stand on her own.

I asked, "How is she?" And then the dam broke. Her words tumbled out. Non stop. For about 15 minutes. Her 32 year old daughter had been seriously ill several times in her life. Now, she lay down the hall with life threatening complications from a critical surgery.

Patti was spent. As she spoke, I noticed that she had the kind of look you get from being absolutely exhausted, but wired on caffeine. She talked about the other times her daughter had almost died. And the shock of having to sign for a second surgery no one saw coming. She was a faithful person and had a robust prayer life. Faith had carried her thus far, but still, it was as though she'd been using all of her energy to hold on to this rope and now she was at the end and slipping.

And then, she got this light in her eye. She told me that she knew a nurse on the floor. That nurse was a sign of hope. She was an insider. Someone who could convey information to Patti. Someone who knew how to work in that system. And that nurse was helping her. Just knowing that nurse made a world of difference. She had a little respite. She knew she wasn't alone. She felt the hope.

And though she was still at the end of her rope, there was a little perch, precarious, but there. Real. Solid. And it was holding her up. She was not longer slipping, but now, at the end of the rope someone had tied a knot and she now had a place to rest for a bit.

She said to me that it was these little things. Little kindnesses. Little signs. Little things that kept her going. From one little kindness to another. They made all the difference.

Salt and light offer the assurance that there is support for you when you feel like you're freefalling. Or your strength has been dissipated by circumstances. Little kindnesses are like little platforms between the series of trapeze bars that we swing from and to. God's promise of changed circumstances is there in the 'in between' times.

In between the hurting and the healing. In between the diagnosis of a torn rotator cuff and swinging a tennis racket again. In between losing your job to getting a better job with more flexibility and benefits. In between putting your house on the market and hosting your first Easter in your new town.

The beatitudes convey divine favor no matter where you are or what you're facing. They offer hope despite your circumstances when you're in grieving...hope when you're being put down or picked on because of your beliefs...hope when you don't have all the answers....hope when chaos surrounds you....and hope for a better tomorrow when today is a bad day. God sees, God cares, and God transforms.

Life is a partnership between creation and Creator. Blessed are the meek—the humble—those who open themselves to God's presence and purpose for their lives. Not those who are prideful or arrogant or controlling. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, integrity, honesty, and goodness. Blessed are the peacemakers. Even when the world is upside down and chaos appears to reign, you have the option to make peace in your own space...in your own heart and mind. And you will be called children of God, inheriting your Father's nature, living in your Father's house, and carrying on your Father's trade.

What's God's trade? Sharing kindness, compassion, love, inclusion, generosity, healing, forgiveness and grace. Two ways to extend grace are to be salt and light. Help keep others going when they would otherwise fall apart. When others are feeling gloomy, reflect Christ's light. Blessed are those who share the light. Amen.