

That list of blessings with which Jesus opened the Sermon on the Mount are called 'the beatitudes' (or supreme blessedness, according to the Oxford Dictionary). Let's be honest, do they really **sound** like blessings? If you've ever read or heard these couplets and felt some confusion, you are not alone. Today we use the term 'blessed' to indicate a sense of gratitude for something. But this list that Jesus gives aren't necessarily things I want. (How about you?) The attributes named don't sound very romantic, or prosperous, or as though they'll make me happy. In fact, they sound dire.

The picture they paint is one of meek, grieving, marginalized people who want a just and fair existence. Jesus says, **these** are the children of God. These people will inherit the earth. They're getting to the kingdom.

Jesus is up on a mountaintop, reminiscent of Moses. He's teaching with authority. Until now, the only teaching he's done is to say, 'repent for the kingdom of God is near'. Change. Turn. He's words call to mind movement and transformation from one way of being to another. Just prior to this passage, he's gone about healing people, again taking pain away and reintegrating people into the fabric of society.

It seems to me that Jesus is doing two things in this passage. He's comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable. Let me be clear, I'm not suggesting that Jesus doesn't want anyone to be comfortable. I think that his whole ministry was to teach humanity to live together in such a way that everyone could be comfortable—that is, free from pain, internal or external.

On one hand, he is *comforting the afflicted*. He is giving those hurting folks hope. We may not know if Jesus ever said, "I see you and I hear you!", but we do know that he's offering a better tomorrow. It's as though he's saying, These won't be your circumstances forever! In fact, you've got a bright future.

At the same time, Jesus is *afflicting the comfortable*. That day, there must have been some who clamored up the mountain just to see what all of the fuss was about. With the same words that bring comfort to some, he issues a call to action to others. By naming the circumstances of the hurting, Jesus invites those who are not having the same experience to *have compassion and to be moved to help!*

Here, Jesus is demonstrating what scholars call God's preferential option for the poor. I'm not talking about financial wealth. Throughout the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, God cares for the wellbeing of the powerless or those who are somehow marginalized. You know the stories....from the Israelites escaping bondage, to Joseph rising from the pit to become powerful in Egypt, to the bleeding woman, to blind men, and lepers.

'Afflict' means to cause pain or suffering OR to affect; trouble. Is Jesus troubling you to action? What's pushed a button for you this week? I'm not talking about the things you see on the news. What's happening in your world—to people you know? Right now, all of the world and right down the street, there are people facing food insecurity, homelessness, injustice, illness, shame, difficulty affording medications,

Just last week, a friend mentioned that in a major university system elsewhere in the US, a blind student couldn't find a classroom because there weren't tactile numbers posted on the class doors. She attempted to ask others for assistance, but many didn't hear her because they were wearing earbuds. This is 30 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act! Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. It may not affect me personally, but if I can alleviate the suffering of one individual; I feel I'm doing my job as a Christian.

I feel confident in saying that every single person in this room today either has been (or personally knows someone who has been) a victim of an unfair, unjustified, inequitable, or biased action. Some of us have pursued change and many of us have not. Maybe it just didn't matter that much or we wanted to put it behind us

or it was just too much effort. I have a strong sense that God is saying to us, "Go! Do!" (Go do what? You already know.) You know where God has called your attention.

Maya Angelou said, "When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed." May it be so. Amen.