

Where Blessing is Found
#4 – “Blessed in Being Yourself”

Psalm 37: 1-11
Matthew 5: 5
Philippians 2: 5-11

In our exploration of the Beatitudes over these past weeks, we've been looking at the attitudes and behaviors which Jesus described as being blessed. May I remind us that the Greek word we translate as blessed is *makarios*, the force of which has to do with how we are aligned to the values of God and his kingdom, as opposed to the frail treasures sought after by this world. If anything, the Beatitudes pose an upside-down set of values as the world would assess things, but a set of values that truly are a right-side-up affirmation in terms of what God says are worth seeking, desiring, striving for and surrendering to. So Jesus tells us that blessed we will be, not because of how many dollars are in our bank account but how much love is in our heart. Blessed we will be, not because we have built impenetrable barricades against our enemies, but because we have learned to stretch out reconciling hands of peace, compassion and justice. Above all, the blessedness that is blissful indeed is being in the centre of God's will and God's love, and letting God be the centre, delight and strength of our souls.

This morning we come to the Beatitude that may be most difficult for us to understand and pursue. Jesus said the meek were blessed, but I wonder to what degree we have deep resistance to very nature, dictate and cost of true meekness.

First, let's look at Jesus' words. Most commonly, biblical versions will either translate the Greek word as meek or gentle, although Holman's translation suggests blessed are the humble while the New International Reader's Version says blessed are those who are free from pride. Eugene Peterson, in the Message,

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puts it this way: *You are blessed when you are content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's when you find yourselves the proud owners of everything that cannot be bought.*

The Greek word which we generally render as meek is the word *praus*, which was regarded by the ancient philosophers as one of the highest ethical standards after which a person might strive. Isn't it interesting, and tragic, how a word that was once so esteemed has fallen into modern day disrepute? Today, meekness is equated with being a spineless pushover. To modern ears, meekness is to be submissive and subservient to a fault. Thus the cynic would quip that while the meek may inherit the earth, it will be fun to see how long they can keep it. Do you remember the old ads for Charles Atlas body building courses in which the hapless and helpless victim is pictured having sand kicked into his face by the bully, while his girlfriend looks on in embarrassment? To be meek is seen as being unable to stand up for oneself or for anybody or anything else.

It is not merely the sense of weakness and ineffectualness that rankles our sensibilities however. One writer suggested that there may be no Bible principle more offensive to human nature, more opposed to human ways of thinking, than this third Beatitude, because the world teaches that self-assertion is good. While we may equate meekness with the bully kicking sand in the face of the wimp, we really can't wait until the wimp has worked out and muscled up to the point that he can give the bully his come-uppence and a darn good thrashing. Modern culture encourages us to be pushy and aggressive in demanding and obtaining our rights – real or imagined – as well as in getting as much as we can whether or not we have any legitimate claim to it. The world says that the purpose of life is to magnify oneself, to make ourselves as big and important as possible. The mantra of our culture is that life and happiness is all about me and my wants, my desires, and my unholy expectation that the world and everyone around me has but one

obligation, which is to conform itself and themselves to what I want.

Blessed, Jesus said, are the meek. Blessed are the gentle, the humble. That Greek word, *praus* was used alternately by doctors to describe a soothing, potent medicine that would bring comfort and restore strength. *Praus* was a word used by sailors to describe those sought-for, ideal fair winds that could safely and swiftly power a ship across the sea. That same word was also used by farmers to describe a broken colt that, having been won by gentleness and trust to obey its master was now fit and conditioned for service. With those images in mind, we could define meekness as great power under control.

Jesus is the epitome of holy meekness, but not in the cloying milquetoast caricatures that are too often drawn from pious sentimentality or naïve piety. But there is nothing wimpish or weak about Jesus, who, angered by the extortion being wrecked upon poor pilgrims to Jerusalem, turned over the tables of the money-changers in the temple. There is nothing wimpish or feeble about Jesus who lambasted the coldly orthodox scribes and hypocritical Pharisees who placed observance over details of the Law over the extending of compassion and healing to those who were crippled, blind, and in bondage.

It is in Golgotha and at Calvary above all, however, that we see the incredible power and strength of Jesus in the face of the most brutal onslaught that was unleashed against his body, his identity and his soul. With all the power of heaven at his command, Jesus did not need to endure the whip, the insult, the cross, the pain, the grave. No hapless victim, he; rather it was with utter self-control and chosen obedience, he suffered the passion and the cross. With complete trust in his Father's purpose, and as the writer of the letter to the Hebrews said, in looking to the joy that was set before him, that is, the joy of the salvation he was winning for you and me and the joy of our reconciliation with the Father through his blood, he endured the

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cross. It was precisely his ability to put us before himself, his magnanimous magnanimity as preacher John Gladstone put it, and his precious humility and meekness, that allowed him to lay aside heaven's glory, take the form of a servant, and yield obedience, even unto death. Peter Kreeft, in his book, *Back to Virtue*, says that if we want to understand what meekness is, we need to look at Jesus. Saying meekness is this or that, he writes, sends us to concepts which are pale copies of reality. It is only when we look at the power of Jesus' self-giving for us, the power of Jesus' mercy to us, the power of Jesus' tenderness over us, the power of Jesus' love with us, that we glimpse the majesty, strength and beauty of that meekness that is truly blessed.

For what we really see in the meekness of Jesus is not just the amazing power of self-control – it should be no wonder, by the way, that self-control is named as one of the fruits of the Spirit – but the power of controlled surrender into God's hands. John Miller wrote that the main point about the meek is not their gentleness but their quiet faith and trust in God. The meek, he said, turn again and again to God for help, for direction, and for the sheer joy of it. William Barclay said it is not so much that blessed are the self-controlled as they are the God-controlled, for only in his service do we find our perfect freedom and in doing God's will that we find our peace.

It is this sense of meekness which we find echoed again and again throughout the Old Testament, most notably in the Psalms. Psalm 37 assures that the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace, but first defines the meek as those who are not overcoming with fretting and fussing and envy, but who trust in the Lord and do good, who delight themselves in God, who commit their way to the Lord and who still themselves before their God and wait patiently on him. Elsewhere, the Psalmist would describe the meek as the person, who in loving and obedient humility, looked to and accepted God's guidance, providence and grace; the person who was never resentful or

bitter about anything life would bring to him; the person who was ever certain that God was always working all things together for good.

In the ancient world, the Greek philosophers always contrasted meekness with another human tendency that they called *hupselokaridia* or lofty heartedness, or which my father would have called having a swelled head. True meekness is that humility that banishes all pride, all *hubris* or puffed up egotism and all vain urges towards self-aggrandizing “me-firstism.”

I love the word meekness but I especially cherish the parallel word humility. Again, it comes from a Greek word, *humus* which means soil, dirt, good earth. To be humbled, our world believes, means letting yourself be pushed face down into the dirt. But the real meaning is to be solidly grounded in truth, solidly rooted in the life-giving soil of God’s providence and power, God’s mercy and love. Humility means being anchored in the rich good earth of God’s embrace, where alone we can be nourished, strengthened, blessed.

Blessed are the humble. Blessed are the meek. It’s been said that without humility, a person cannot learn, because the first step to learning is the realization of our own ignorance. There is the famous line of the teacher, remarking on his students, that they would no doubt be excellent scholars if they were not already so convinced of their intelligence. In the same way, one author said, without humility, there can be no such thing as love, for the beginning of love is the awe of being loved in our unworthiness and unloveliness. Without humility, there can be no true religion, for all true worship begins with acknowledgement of our weakness and need for God. Or as a well known prayer requests: save us, dear Lord, from being so full of ourselves that there is no room in our hearts for you.

Blessed are the meek, for they are truly grounded in the Lord as their refuge and strength, their help and hope. Blessed are the meek who know their woundedness, confess their

sinfulness, lament their brokenness and call out in expectant hope for the ready grace and marvellous healing power of the Saviour. Blessed are the meek who rejoice with unrelenting gratitude that though they were nobodies, they have been made somebodies through the amazing claim and grace of Jesus Christ, and, through his blood and righteousness, have been called and claimed as nothing less than the beloved, precious children of God.

A.W. Tozer once wrote, *The meek man is not a human mouse afflicted with a sense of his own inferiority. Rather he may be in his moral life as bold as a lion and as strong as Samson; but he has stopped being fooled about himself. He has accepted God's estimate of his own life. He knows he is as weak and helpless as God declared him to be, but paradoxically, he knows at the same time that he is in the sight of God of more importance than angels. In himself, nothing; in God, everything. That is his motto.*

Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those whose lives are so rooted in the Lord that they can rest securely and joyfully in the knowledge of who they are and whose they are; whose every passion, impulse and instinct are under control because they are themselves God-controlled and surrendered into his will. Blessed are those who, in their need and weakness, humbly and happily look to God in everything, for such a person already owns everything most worth wanting.

Let us pray:

Everlasting God, may this mind be in us that was in our Saviour, Jesus: that as he from his loftiness stooped to the death of the Cross, so may we learn and live such meekness, trust, obedience and love, and become the truly blessed of the earth, and ever more fully show forth his likeness, from glory unto glory. In his name we ask it. Amen.