

July 12 Worship Transcript

Welcome and Prayer - Leann Toews

Good morning Tabor Worshippers. As some of us thought the pandemic would be over by now, we find ourselves in the middle of increasing cases of the virus. The blessing in all of this is that church is more than just a building. It would be nice to worship inside again.

The church is a community that creatively seeks the Spirit in new ways. It is a fellowship of followers who seek truth. We are the church dispersed right now, but we are committed to live the life of Christ. Christ said, where two or three are gathered, there he is also.

As a retired teacher, I am in awe of Jesus as teacher. He uses stories, examples, parables and in today's text - beatitudes. Jesus as a knack for drawing out his listeners and he lets them discover their own answers and their own truth.

I like that he sits down with the crowd, making himself equal to those around him. His message is consistent. Wherever we are watching and listening, let us remember that Christ calls us to aspire to live as he taught and lived.

Let's pray: Jesus, our teacher, inspire us to be eager learners of your truth. Remind us that following your lessons makes us better citizens of the world. Motivate us to live lives that reflect your teachings. Open our hearts to receive your love, grace, and peace. In the name of the greatest teacher of all, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Children's Story - Sheri Schmidt

Good morning, kids! I wonder if you can guess where I am? It might look a little bit like a library. This is a place in the office where I work, which is a law office. So behind me you see all those books? Those are books of laws. Laws are basically instructions or rules about how we are supposed to live with other people. There are a lot of them, aren't there?

Did you know that Jesus gave us a set of instructions for living a happy life? [Hold up Bible.] Those instructions are in just ONE book – the Bible! In the book of Matthew, the Bible says, "Now when Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to Him, and He began to teach them." He taught them a lesson we call "The Beatitudes." The dictionary says the word "beatitudes" means "supreme blessedness." I like that! So when Jesus was teaching these beatitudes, he started each with the words, "Blessed are they..." Some translations of the Bible use the word happy instead of blessed. So these are Jesus' instructions for us to be happy – or supremely blessed.

I also like that the word "beatitudes" has two parts to it: be and attitude. The Beatitudes are ways that we can be and attitudes we can have. Let's look at a few of these beatitudes. Jesus said to...

Be caring – comfort people who are sad.

Be humble – build each other up.

Be merciful - forgive when people make mistakes.

Be peacemakers – look for solutions when people are fighting.
Be pure of heart - have an attitude of good and pure thoughts.
Be righteous – have an attitude of wanting to do right.
Be strong – remember Jesus is always with you even when life gets hard.
Be joyful and glad – God will reward you in Heaven!

I like that Jesus gave us instructions for how to be and what kind of attitudes to have. And Jesus says that we will be happy and God will bless us if we follow His instructions for living with each other. Now just because we follow Jesus's instructions doesn't mean everything will always go right for us, that we'll get everything we want, or that life won't get hard sometimes, but it DOES mean that we will be blessed by knowing that we are following Jesus's instructions and that God will always be right there with us in every part of our lives, good and bad. Let's pray.

Dear God, thank You for the BE ATTITUDES. Please help us follow Your instructions and your example for a happy and supremely blessed life. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Have a great week! I hope to see you soon!

Scripture Reading: Matthew 5:1-12 (NIV) - Noah, Ethan, Mary, and Phil Schmidt

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them. He said:

- 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed are those who mourn,
 for they will be comforted.
5 Blessed are the meek,
 for they will inherit the earth.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
 for they will be filled.
7 Blessed are the merciful,
 for they will be shown mercy.
8 Blessed are the pure in heart,
 for they will see God.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers,
 for they will be called children of God.
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
 for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Word of God for the People of God. ***Thanks Be to God!***

Sermon “Blessed Are...” - Pastor Phil Schmidt

How old were you when you learned that Santa Clause wasn't real? I hope I'm not bursting any bubbles right now... :)...and to be honest, I can't remember how old I was.

How old were you when you learned to ride a pedal bike? I was about 5.

Apparently, this “how old were you when...” is a popular question circulating social media these days. For example, how old were you when you learned that the hole in the handle of a pot could be used for holding messy cooking spoons? I was 33, because I learned this yesterday.

Or, how about one that is pretty relevant to our current cultural climate: How old were you when you realized that Jesus wasn't White? While this is something I haven't thought a lot about, it is really only in the last couple years that I have learned this.

We could go on and on with “how old were you when...” questions, but my purpose in sharing these kinds of questions is that once you learn something new, like “Santa Clause isn't real” or “I can ride a bike” or “that hole in the pot has a purpose” or “Jesus wasn't White”...once you learn this new thing and new perspective, it is very difficult to unsee, to unlearn it. This new learning, new perspective, begins to shape how you view the world around you. And that's a good thing even if it does challenge how you previously thought things were.

So what does this have to do with our Scripture passage this morning?

Well, in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus saw crowds of people gathered to learn from him. He was a dynamic, powerful teacher, after all. When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down, taking the position of a teacher. I imagine that a hush came over the crowd. Jesus' disciples came to him and he began to teach them, a teaching we know as “The Sermon on the Mount.”

And in this sermon, Jesus taught his disciples a new perspective, a new way of understanding the world and God's purposes in the world. Jesus begins the sermon with what we know as “The Beatitudes,” statements of blessing proclaiming wonderful news to specific groups of people. And from the very beginning and all throughout these “Blessings,” we see that they do not fit with the world works. After all, as N.T. Wright says in his commentary: “In our world, still, most people think that wonderful news consists of success, wealth, long life, victory in battle. Jesus is offering wonderful news for the humble, the poor, the mourners, the peacemakers.”¹

From a “worldly” perspective, these blessings don't make sense. In our world throughout history, the poor aren't given a kingdom; not all who mourn are comforted; the bold and powerful are the ones who inherit land, not the meek; many people who work for righteousness and justice don't see fulfilling results; people who practice mercy aren't always shown mercy; the pure in heart are often discounted and ignored; peacemakers are often criticized for being passive and weak; and, like the first Beatitude, those who are persecuted aren't given a

¹ Wright, N.T.. Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15 (The New Testament for Everyone) (pp. 36-37). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

kingdom. Jesus drives in on this last one even harder, changing the language from “Blessed are the...” to “Blessed are you...” He’s making it personal for his disciples. “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12).

Once again, from a worldly perspective, how is being insulted and persecuted a blessing?

These statements of “blessing,” of “wonderful news” clearly don’t fit in the systems of our world. And that’s a key part of the point, right? Jesus isn’t naming how the systems of the world work, he is offering a new teaching, a new perspective on how the world is meant to be under the reign of God. Jesus is describing what life is like in God’s heavenly kingdom.

As N.T. Wright says, “The life of heaven – the life of the realm where God is already king – is to become the life of the world, transforming the present ‘earth’ into the place of beauty and delight that God always intended. And those who follow Jesus are to begin to live by this rule here and now. That’s the point of the Sermon on the Mount, and these ‘beatitudes’ in particular. They are a summons to live in the present in the way that will make sense in God’s promised future; because that future has arrived in the present in Jesus of Nazareth. It may seem upside down, but we are called to believe, with great daring, that it is in fact the right way up. Try it and see.”²

So how do we try it out? How do we live out the Beatitudes? As Sheri described in her children’s story, the Beatitudes can be thought of as attitudes for us to embrace in our lives. They describe a way for us to live as followers of Jesus, with humility and mercy, pursuing justice and reconciliation.

And, there’s more. These aren’t just a list of ways to live, they are also a lens for us to see where God is at work in the world. God is at work bringing comfort to those who mourn, filling those who are pursuing justice, showing mercy to the merciful. God is at work bringing joy to those who follow the ways of Jesus even amidst insults and persecution.

And, there’s more. The Beatitudes describe a way to live, they give us a lens to see God at work, and their primary purpose is to announce God’s New Covenant.

Let’s think back to the story of God and God’s people. God freed the people from slavery in Egypt by leading them through the Red Sea, then journeyed with them through the wilderness to Mt. Sinai where God entered into covenant relationship with the people. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, God renewed the covenant and led the people through the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

Now let’s consider the story of Jesus. He came out of Egypt, where he had been living as a refugee. He went through the water of baptism. He spent 40 days in the wilderness facing temptation. He re-entered the Promised Land, called disciples, then climbed a mountain, and proclaimed God’s teaching.

² Wright, N.T.. Matthew for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-15 (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 38). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

The parallels are so clear and I hope this is an “aha” moment for some of you. Jesus is a new Moses leading God’s people into a new life of freedom and teaching them God’s laws, but more than that, teaching them to live in covenant relationship with the living God. But Jesus isn’t just a new Moses, he is in fact the Son of God, who speaks and acts with the full authority of Yahweh! And the message that he begins to proclaim through the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount is that all are welcome to join the New Covenant people of God by embracing a new kind of kingdom that is completely upside down from the systems of our world, but in reality is the right-side-up way of life as God intended from the very beginning. Can I get an Amen?

So how can we today live into the new covenant reality that Jesus proclaims through the Beatitudes?

Well as many of you know, the reality of systemic racial injustice in our country has been weighing heavily on my heart as it has been weighing heavily on many people’s hearts these days. And so I have sought to learn more about the worldly systems and structures in place that have been so harmful to so many people, systems like “white supremacy,” “mass incarceration,” and so much more. I have learned more about these systems through reading and reflection as well as through webinars. I will include a resource list in the written transcript of some of the resources I have been looking into and would encourage you to do so as well. My purpose in seeking to learn more about these unjust systems is so that I can more fully live out Jesus’ Beatitudes, so that I can join others in living with more hunger and thirst for justice and righteousness, so that I can join others in working for peace and reconciliation in a divided world, so that I can join others in taking steps toward being anti-racist in the pursuit of dismantling the unjust systems of the world.

You see, that’s what happens. When followers of Jesus take his teaching seriously, they embody the New Covenant by living more fully into the Reign of God, which is already present in our world. And when we live into the Reign of God, when we declare our full allegiance to the ways of Jesus, we not only see the unjust systems and structures of our world, we join together as a global body to disarm, dismantle, and destroy these unjust structures so that more and more people can find hope and freedom. Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let us journey together in this way.

I’ll end this video sermon by showing a video by Mennonite Mission Network entitled “Jesus Wasn’t White.” I hope you will join me in digging into this and other resources in the pursuit of embodying the new world Jesus began to proclaim through the Beatitudes.

Resources

Videos:

- “Jesus Wasn’t White” video by Mennonite Mission Network - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pOzU4qFfT3M>
- “Expanding Our Witness - The Adaptive Church Webinar Series with Leader magazine” by MennoMedia - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pfjEvv4M5FY&feature=youtu.be&utm_content=53a40adfe6bc322a09f743dce2f13f6a&utm_campaign=Expanding%20Our%20Witness%3A%20Recording%20Information&utm_source=Robly.com&utm_medium=email
- “Race, Church, & Change Webinar” by Mennonite Church USA - <http://mennoniteusa.org/leadership-development/webinars/>

Books:

- *Trouble I've Seen: Changing the Way the Church Views Racism* by Drew G.I. Hart (contact Pastor Phil to join the book discussion)
- *White Awake: An honest look at what it means to be white* by Daniel Hill
- *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander
- *Good White Racist? Confronting Your Role in Racial Injustice* by Kerry Connelly

Prayer and Blessing: Pastor Phil Schmidt

Let us pray:

Gracious and Loving God, we thank you for sending Jesus to reveal your reign, and to reveal how we can live in the world as you intend. Teach us O God, to follow Jesus, embodying the Beatitudes in the way we see and live.

In the midst of a world full of division, we pray for reconciliation. Help people all around the community, county, state, country, and world to listen to one another. Be with all who are working for justice and peace. Help us each fight the virus of racism by learning more about the unjust systems in our world, by supporting those working to undo these unjust systems, and by doing our own work toward becoming anti-racist.

Gracious God, amidst the continuing rise of COVID-19 cases in our area and around the country, we pray for your healing and strength. Be with all who are especially anxious and fearful in this time. Be with all who have been diagnosed with COVID. Be with all friends and family who have lost loved ones. We pray for all who work in hospitals and all who live and work in nursing homes. "We pray for those who have medical conditions or disabilities that put them at higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19."³ We pray for a transformation of people in our society away from individualism toward acting in ways that promote and protect the health and well-being of the most vulnerable people in society. We pray for all who work with schools as they seek to make decisions for this upcoming school year. We pray for your grace and wisdom, O God.

Healing God, we pray for your continued presence to be with all who are recovering or dealing with illness. We pray for Dora Unruh as she recuperates at home after procedures to increase blood flow to her leg. We continue to pray for Esley Schmidt as he continues to recover at home. Bring your healing to all who are hurting.

God of Blessing, we pray for your blessings to be poured out into our lives and our world as we seek to embrace the New Covenant revealed through Jesus' teaching and living. Amen.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus continues after the Beatitudes by proclaiming "You are the salt of the earth" (5:13) and "You are the light of the world" (5:14). Therefore, may we follow Jesus in living lives of salt and light in the world. Amen.

³ <https://www.facebook.com/MennoniteChurchUSA/photos/a.10150734636029863/10159734434289863/>