

July 11, 2021

*"Blessed Are Those Who Mourn"*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Matthew 5:4

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Our scripture for today comes from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 5 verse 4. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. As I mentioned last week, this summer we're going to be looking at Jesus' famous passage from his Sermon on the Mount, known as "The Beatitudes". Now the reason I chose to preach on the beatitudes is because after coming out of a year plus of COVID, I sense people are thinking or re-thinking about what brings them lasting, inner happiness in life. And I believe the beatitudes hold the key to achieving this happiness. Because Jesus begins each beatitude with the words... "Blessed are..." Which, as we learned last week, really means, "O the bliss!" "Oh the happiness!" So that being said, how might we change our thinking to "be" the "attitudes", the be-attitudes, Jesus describes?

Because having the right attitude makes all the difference in life. Pastor and author, Charles Swindoll emphasizes this, saying, "The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of our attitude on our life. Attitude is more important than education, money, circumstances, failures, successes, or what other people think or say. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill. Attitude will make or break a person...a home...a church. And the remarkable thing is that we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for the day. We cannot change what's happened in our past. We cannot change the fact that other people will act in a certain way. We don't know what the future will bring. So the only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me, and 90% of how I react to it!" That was well said don't you think? And I'm sure we would all agree with his premise about having a positive attitude. But then, how are we to react to today's particular beatitude? "Blessed are those who mourn", or as St. Luke puts it in his gospel, "Blessed are those who weep". Because if there's one thing in life that can negatively affect our attitude, it is when mourning or sorrow or pain or depression enter in. And the truth is, there are times when we all shed tears over situations in our lives. Yet here is Jesus effectively telling us, "Happy are those who are grieving, happy are those with a broken heart."

So, let's look a little deeper at what Jesus is saying. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." When we think of mourning, we often think of death, and certainly most of us here have experienced the death of a loved one, and we know the pain it brings. But there are other times we

grieve or weep, and suffer as well. Like when something goes wrong in our lives and we bemoan what's happening. Maybe it's a health concern, either ours or someone we dearly love. Maybe we have children or grandchildren who are struggling in some way, or going down the wrong path in life. Maybe our relationship with our spouse or partner isn't what it once was. Maybe there is a job situation that's causing us distress. Or maybe we're feeling guilty for something we've done or not done, and we feel depressed. Yes, all of us suffer in some way or another over our circumstances. And the Bible tells us that grief and sorrow will always have a place in our lives. Ecclesiastes says, "There is an appointed time for everything. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to tear down, and a time to build up; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance." So how do we respond to these situations we all must endure?

Well, many times what happens is people respond with frustration, anger, even resentment. We rage about what's happened to us, looking for someone to blame, and we become bitter with others, with the world, and especially with God. "Why God, did you let this happen, why God does it have to be like this?" I'm sure many are feeling this way in Surfside right now with that building collapse. Bad things happen to good people and we question why and often turn away from God and put up a barrier between God and ourselves. And when we have this attitude, there is no possible way to move toward healing, toward reconciliation, toward peace, and especially toward Jesus' promise of comfort. And the ironic consequence of all this is that we end up actually doubling our suffering. The hurt we are experiencing – and the loss of our relationship with God. So you can just imagine how lonely, how helpless, how desperate, people feel when they're in this position.

But, there is a second way to respond. Not with anger or resentment or desperation, but with an attitude that opens us to receive God's comfort. Remember Jesus' invitation: "Come to me, all who are weary and heavily burdened. Come to me, take my yoke upon you and I will give you rest for your soul." Can you feel the comfort in that promise? Because consider who it is that's offering to share in your grief and pain and suffering – the God of the universe who is the Prince of Peace, the Great Physician, the Good Shepherd. The God who knows exactly what you are going through because he is the Word, God, made flesh and bone. Flesh that was heir to a thousand wrongs and insults and injustices, flesh that even wept when he heard that his good friend Lazarus' had died, flesh that bore the pain of scourging, flesh that went to the cross to suffer for the injustices and sins of the world. Yes, a God who not only shares in our grief and suffering, but who overcame it all. And if we can open ourselves up to his presence and his love, we can bear any burden, any problem, this mortal life may throw our way.

But there's more. Because the comfort that Jesus gives is not an "Oh, poor you" kind of comfort. Rather the comfort Jesus gives is the kind that offers strength, encouragement, and hope for a better future. It a comfort that leads us beyond our grief to a new attitude. An attitude that says, perhaps our spouse isn't totally at fault for the troubles in our marriage, or the boss isn't that unreasonable, or our kids or grandkids are trying to reach out to us in some way and we shouldn't give up on them. Or maybe what's happening in our lives means it's time to make some changes. Or maybe it means one door may be closing, and we have to wait for another one, a better one to open for us. You see, knowing our loving, omniscient God has promised to comfort us, should cause us to ask the question, "Lord, is there something you're trying to say to me? Do I need to trust in you more? Do I need to be more understanding of others and less judgmental of those around me? Do I need to smooth out some rough edges?" And with this attitude, we soon find ourselves, well, happier! Immersed in God's strength and hope and love. And this leads us to live more faithful, and fruitful, lives. And that's when we reach the point that Jesus is describing today. Our troubles, our weeping, our mourning, becomes a blessing when we say, "I give up trying to do it on my own, my way. I'm giving it all to God." Because remember another of his promises: "I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord. "Plans to give you peace and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Let me end with a story that illustrates the comfort Jesus can give. A family is out for a drive through the country on a Sunday afternoon. It's a beautiful day, and they're traveling leisurely down the road. Suddenly the two children begin to shout from the back seat, "Daddy, stop the car! Stop the car! There's a dog back there on the side of the road! It looks hurt. Daddy, stop the car." The father says, "So, there's a dog on the side of the road." "But Daddy, you have to stop and see what's wrong." "I don't have to stop and see what's wrong," says the father. "But Daddy, you have to save him. If you don't, he'll die." The father protests, and after more back and forth, the mother turns to her husband and says, "Dear, you have to go back." So he turns the car around, pulls off to the side of the road and goes to the dog. It's in pretty bad condition and has obviously been through a lot of pain. It's down to skin and bones, sore-eyed and full of fleas. But the father reaches down to pick up the dog. It growls and bares it teeth, and strikes back the only way it knows how, biting the father's hand so hard it begins to bleed. The father picks up the dog anyway, and they take it home. The children bathe it and feed it and they convince their father to let the dog stay. They fix a comfortable bed, fit for a king, and care for the dog. A few days pass and one afternoon the father sits down and the dog comes over and curls up at his feet. The father reaches down his hand, still showing the deep wounds, to pet the dog. But this time,

the dog does not growl or bite. Instead, it looks up, fully expecting to receive his caress. Is this the same dog? Of course not! You and I know what the difference is. It's that inner feeling of peace, of love, of healing, of comfort. The dog knows it has been blessed. Two thousand years ago, God reached down to us, and he blessed us. And if you look at his hand, it's full of wounds as well.<sup>1</sup> Yes, "Blessed are those who mourn, who weep, who are troubled in one way or another... for they will be comforted." Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Craddock Stories (edited), Fred Craddock