

July 18, 2021

*“Blessed Are the Meek”*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Matthew 5:1-5

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Today we will be looking at Jesus' third beatitude... “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.” Now, when we hear this beatitude we might be thinking...could Jesus really have meant what he said? How could the meek ever inherit the earth? The meek are afraid to negotiate a left hand turn across traffic on Cape Cod in the summer, or navigate a rotary. So how could they ever inherit the earth?

Well, today's beatitude, along with the first two beatitudes we learned about over the past two weeks, are really divine paradoxes the Lord is sharing with us. It's the truth, standing on its head, so to speak. Let me review the first two beatitudes. First – “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” This does not mean we are to be down or depressed. It means we are to be rich in humility. To be “poor in spirit” means we are not arrogant, or prideful, or self-centered, rather we are humble. And humility is a virtue that our Lord Jesus used to even describe himself! “I am gentle and humble in heart.” So blessed are you when you are poor in spirit, humble, not self-centered or prideful, for yours is the kingdom of heaven. Second, “Blessed are those who mourn.” This does not mean we will not have trouble or sorrow in this life. Rather, it means that when we do, we need to put our trust and hope in God. For we have a God who came to us in the flesh, to suffer a thousand wrongs and injustices, just as we suffer. Yet he left us with this assurance of comfort: “In this world you will have troubles, but take heart, I have overcome the world.” So blessed are you who mourn, for if you trust in the Lord, you have Jesus' promise that you will indeed be comforted with his strength, his peace, his hope. You see, the point is, when we look at the beatitudes as Jesus intended them, we see that they are the opposite of what the world out there believes. And that friends, should make us feel blessed... very happy, indeed!

So now let's look further at today's beatitude. Blessed are the meek. Now this beatitude is also meant to be the opposite of what the world believes. Because the world would say that you should not feel blessed or happy if you're meek or lowly or submissive. Instead... you should feel blessed and happy if you're strong, powerful. To make it in our culture, you have to be the opposite of meek – you have to be assertive, competitive, and aggressive. After all, power is might: look at all it can do and buy. But here's the rub. Those things are shallow, temporal and someday, they will end and all be gone. But what will never end are those godly characteristics and virtues that will assure us of this promise of the

Lord: “Well done, my good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Master.” Imagine hearing Jesus tell you that at the end of your life. Yes, blessed are you!

You see, the fact is, that meekness, as Jesus describes it, means something very, very different from how the world views meekness. Meekness in biblical terms means caring, concern, consideration, gentleness, and a lack of contentiousness. It does not mean lack of moral character or strength, it does not mean weakness, or submission to injustice out of fear. Let's change today's beatitude and think of Jesus saying, “Blessed are the caring, the concerned, the considerate, the gentle...” Sounds better already, doesn't it? Blessed are the meek!

And do you know what else? Ironically, it takes strength, and a lot of it, to be meek the way Jesus describes. It's interesting how language can sometimes get us into trouble. If you look in Webster's Dictionary, you might be surprised to find that one of the definitions for the word meek says, “enduring injury with patience and without resentment.” Now anyone who has sustained an injury, be it physical or emotional, is well aware that to truly endure it with patience and without resentment, to persevere in the face of pain and trial, is extremely difficult. To endure like this takes an incredible amount of courage and strength. The point Jesus is making is that being biblically meek actually means you are strong. Let me give you some examples. The Bible says that Moses was “very meek, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth.” But Moses was anything but weak. How do we know? Because he had the strength and courage to stand up to, and argue with, the most powerful man in his time, the Pharaoh, over the injustices his people were suffering. He had the strength and courage to unite thousands of disheartened slaves and guide them for forty long, arduous years through the unknown wilderness to freedom. He even had the courage to argue with God at times. And, that's an important point to remember as an aside for today. Our Almighty God is not so insecure that he can't handle a candid discussion with any one of his sons or daughters, be it Moses, or me or you! So Moses – meek? Not the way we normally think about it – as weak and insecure. Isn't he, instead, a picture of strength and power? And wasn't Gandhi? And wasn't Martin Luther King, Jr?

And here's another example. In the original King James Version of the Bible, Jesus says, “Take my yoke upon you for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Now – our Lord Jesus meek and lowly in the worldly sense? Jesus, who stood up to every imaginable challenge. Jesus, who persevered against the establishment and the world with determination and steadfast resolve.

Let's look at ways in which he was "meek." Remember the prostitute who crashed a dinner party Jesus was attending with the Pharisees. She shocked everyone when she fell at his feet weeping, wanting his forgiveness. The Pharisees were outraged and wanted her sent away, but Jesus told them, "No." He then blessed her by telling her, "Your sins are forgiven." And doesn't that show not only strength of character in the face of those in power, but also compassion, when you offer mercy to someone who, the world says, doesn't deserve it? Or how about the time just before his crucifixion when his friend and disciple Peter denied and abandoned him. Most of us would be angry and resentful and have nothing further to do with a friend like that. But Jesus not only forgives Peter, but gives him a second chance. He asks "Simon Peter, do you truly love me?" Peter answered three times in remorse, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." And Jesus puts his utmost trust in him and tells him, "Then feed my lambs... Take care of my sheep." Doesn't that take strength to put your trust again in someone who has let you down or disappointed you? And how about when Jesus was humiliated, beaten, and then crucified, enduring his suffering without hatred or resentment. And hanging there on the cross, what was Jesus' response? "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Think of how we react when someone wrongs us?

Yes, being biblically meek means we are to be caring, concerned, considerate, and gentle. And it means we are very, very strong. For consider – who really is stronger – the person who rants and raves when angered, or the person who exercises self-control and clear thinking. The person who has to tell you all the wonderful things he has done, or the person who quietly and competently achieves along the way. The person who vows to seek revenge and "get even," or the person who forgives, holds no grudges, turns the other cheek and goes on with life. And, in the end, living with this attitude, aren't the meek the ones really the most happy, most at peace on this earth? With themselves, with others, and with God? That's why the meek are blessed. They are happy in themselves and in their God, and they need nothing else. In fact, the Message version of today's beatitude says, "You're blessed when you're content with just who you are – no more, no less. That's the moment, you'll find yourselves proud owners of everything that can't be bought." Imagine being that meek. Owners of everything on this earth that can't be bought! Yes, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Amen.