

**Micah 6:1-8; Psalm 15; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Matthew 5:1-12**

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All four scripture lessons for today have iconic passages that are worth remembering. But I think that the place where I need to focus is with the gospel lesson which begins: “When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain...” This is the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. And as soon as the *mountain* is mentioned there then it should be a cue to us...*that something big is getting ready to happen.*

In the biblical sensibility, mountains were places where the mystery of God’s revelation can happen. The Ten Commandments were given on a mountain. When Elijah experienced the presence of God in a “still small voice”, it was on a mountain. Jesus was transfigured in light on a mountain. After Jesus’ resurrection, he appeared to his disciples on a mountain. See what I mean? In the Bible, mountains are places of revelation. [I could sense that possibility in Iceland, when we were there, and Iceland does have its own holy mountains.] And so, the mention of the mountain at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount is *a cue that something revelatory is about to happen...* something from God that would not be obvious at all.

And that revelation begins in Jesus with the Beatitudes—the nine Blessings given by Jesus. This is scripture we are so familiar with that it almost escapes our notice. I know that I often think about the Beatitudes as a comfort...a solace. And it is that. But every time that I look at it more closely I realize there is more going on than that. I am surprised that once again I get *twisted about* and *challenged* and some of the Beatitudes end up *discomforting* me. Which I guess should not be surprising when *a revelation of God is happening!* Revelation from God does not fit the way we normally think about ourselves and the world. The apostle Paul said that clearly in Corinthians.

So, the way I would describe the Beatitudes is to say that their unusual power is found in the fact that Jesus proclaimed *whom God really gives attention*. Being noticed is not a simple thing. It carries the potential for good but also a certain amount of peril. To have been noticed by your teacher in school could mean that you had done *well* in something—or that you had been *caught* in something else. To be noticed by your peers—and this is dramatically more perilous now with social media—to be noticed by your peers opens both the possibility of *praise* or *ridicule*. And so, it is possible to have learned that, sometimes, it is better to *not* be noticed and lay low.

But the Beatitudes is all about *being noticed...*by none other than *God*. And being noticed by God is far more wonderful—and potentially perilous--than all our human experiences of being noticed. So, it is wonderful in the beginning of the Beatitudes when Jesus gives his attention to the world that God can say: “Blessed are you”!

Jesus spoke blessings where no blessings were to be found:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit (whose courage for life is stolen away)...  
and blessed are those who mourn (whose loves are taken away).*

God especially notices *them*. God *cherishes* them. God will not *forget* them. Jesus announced *God’s* kindly attention upon us in that kind of *suffering and vulnerability*. That is a revelation indeed because it is not at all obvious from our experience of life. The world does not easily bless us then...in fact, *the world itself is our pain*. It is no wonder then that our whole sense of the Beatitudes is easily overshadowed by these two opening blessings from God. They are shockingly wonderful.

The next blessings, however, *without any warning*, take a different tact. These blessings are not to those who have *suffered losses* but to those who have *embraced certain ways of living*. Jesus goes on to bless five ways of living in the world: the “meek”, i.e. those who do not seek to call attention to themselves but quietly focus on doing the right thing; those who seek to do the right thing; those who are merciful; those who are focused on God; and those who seek peace. And then because living like that can be so vulnerable, there are two additional blessings to cover the inevitable fall out from that.

All these blessings are beautiful too of course. But we can start to wonder if we can see ourselves in any of these ways of living. This is where the former consolation of the Beatitudes becomes more complex. Because the Beatitudes do end up presenting us with an *ethical challenge*. It is not unlike the brilliant summary of the best of the Old Testament ethic from the prophet Micah which we heard: “[The LORD] has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” And then we must inevitably wonder: Do I do that?

The Beatitudes, in their ethical challenge, is quite a revelation of God. Who would have necessarily thought that *God cared* about things like righteousness...mercy...and making peace? Do you recall that *the gods of old did not care* about any such things—they were as reckless or detached as human beings can be. And perhaps it may be said that *the little human gods of today* still don’t care about righteousness, mercy, and making peace.

And yet the God of Jesus Christ gives attention especially to those who are seeking what is *good*, what is *just*, what is *kind*, and what is *humble*, when the world so often doesn’t seem to care about such things.

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Maybe after we’ve heard the revelation of God in these blessings we may realize that what God blesses *are things actually missing in our lives*.

And what we may need to do is...to return to the beginning of the Beatitudes again, where quite shockingly, quite wonderfully, *there is still a place for us*:

*Blessed are the poor in spirit...for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
“Blessed are those who mourn...for they will be comforted.*