

“Starting the Sermon on the Mount”
Matthew 5:1-12
1/29/2022

We know from last week,
Jesus has just finished calling his first disciples,
Simon and Andrew, James and John
Instead of fishing for fish,
Jesus is now showing them how to fish for people.

Jesus has been traveling through the region of Galilee,
Teaching in the synagogues
Telling about the good news
of the kingdom of heaven that is coming
and healing people who had
various diseases
pain
demon possession
epilepsy
and paralysis

I bet that was something for
Simon and Andrew, James and John to witness.

And now, he brings them up a mountain,
Jesus sits down with his new disciples
And begins to preach...

³ *"Happy are people who are hopeless,
because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

⁴ *"Happy are people who grieve,
because they will be made glad.*

⁵ *"Happy are people who are humble,
because they will inherit the earth.*

– Matthew 5:3-5

Now, if you were here last November on All Saints' Sunday,
You might be thinking
Wait a minute, this sounds familiar

It should, because, if you remember,
More often than not,
The Gospel reading for All Saints Day is the Beatitudes

Two months ago, we heard the Gospel of Luke's version
From the Sermon on the Plain.
This morning we are hearing the Gospel of Matthew's version
As we begin the Sermon on the Mount
We'll be looking at the Sermon on the Mount
For the next couple of weeks

Back in November,
We talked about the Greek word μακάριος
(*Show μακάριος Slide*)

In 1611, we translated μακάριος as “Blessed”
when the King James Bible was written
400 years later, in 2011,
when the *Common English Bible* came out
The one we use today here,
μακάριος was translated as “happy”
(*Show μακάριος – happy Slide*)

The problem is that
we don't have a good English word for μακάριος

If we could make up a word that means at the same time
(*Show μακάριος – Rich/Fortunate Slide*)

Blessed
Happy
Rich
Fortunate
We'd come a bit closer

(*Show blank Slide*)

So this morning, let's translate it as “supremely fortunate”

³ *"Supremely fortunate are people who are hopeless,
because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*

⁴ *"Supremely fortunate are people who grieve,
because they will be made glad.*

⁵ *"Supremely fortunate are people who are humble,
because they will inherit the earth.*

At first glance,
This might not make sense
How can a bad thing,
Being hopeless
Grieving
Be something that is supremely fortunate?

But let's pause here...

As Jesus is giving his sermon on the mountain right now,
Is he preaching to the large crowds that have gathered
Coming from the region of Galilee
And the Decapolis
(the region of the ten cities south
and on the other side of Jordan River from Galilee)
Jerusalem
And the region of Judea

Or is Jesus giving this part of his sermon
to the new small group of disciples?

Jesus **is now** teaching his **second level class**,
In addition to the Good News of the kingdom of heaven
And his power in healing
Jesus is now talking about discipleship

Jesus could be telling his new followers here
"You're in a really good place when you..."

*" You're in a really good place when you are hopeless,
because the kingdom of heaven is yours.*

*" You're in a really good place when you grieve,
because you will be made glad.*

*" You're in a really good place when you are humble,
because you will inherit the earth.*

Again, this might not make sense,
Until you realize that the Beatitudes
Are not some Pollyanna mumble jumble
Not some, *now, now, everything is going to be alright*
Placid passive promise

Jesus is beginning his master class on discipleship here

The Beatitudes are an active proclamation about the kingdom of
heaven that is beginning to break forth
Even though life is not perfect or without challenges

And **it is a call** to get going and be active and at work
To transform our present world and present reality
Into something closer God's desires and dreams
For us and the world

Who knows,
Before the Sermon on the Mount is done
Jesus just might tell his disciples to pray something like
*Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done;
on earth, as it is in heaven.*

Jesus is teaching his new disciples what they already know.
He is teaching the proclamation of the Prophets
That has echoed through the centuries
For those who worship, and love, and serve
The LORD God
The God of Israel

Coupled with today's reading from Matthew
Is this word from the Prophet Micah

¹ *Hear what the LORD is saying:
Arise, lay out the lawsuit before the mountains;
let the hills hear your voice!*

⁶ *With what should I approach the LORD
and bow down before God on high?
Should I come before him with entirely burned offerings,
with year-old calves?*
⁷ *Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with many torrents of oil?
Should I give my oldest child for my crime;
the fruit of my body for the sin of my spirit?*
⁸ *He has told you, human one, what is good
and what the LORD requires from you:
to do justice, embrace faithful love,
and walk humbly with your God.*

– Micah 6:1, 6-8

To follow Jesus,
To be a disciple of Jesus,
Means that we listen to what Jesus teaches
And that we actually do it

And guess what?
So much of what Jesus taught
Was already present in the Law and the Prophets

Such as the Prophet Micah

As Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount,
His discipleship orientation session
The Beatitudes,
The
" You're in a really good place when you are hopeless...
" You're in a really good place when you grieve...
" You're in a really good place when you are humble...
The statements are not some passive drivel

They show us to power and the blessing,
the supremely fortunate place
that can be ours as we live into this kingdom of heaven
that Jesus talks about

This place the Micah and so many other prophets envisioned

What does the LORD require from those
who worship, love, and serve God?

To do justice
To love faithfully
To walk with a humble heart in God's sight

When we live this way, we can transform our world

At first glance,
we might think that a place that is not at all like heaven
is a federal prison

Yet, Rick and Al can tell you stories about times
when it seemed as though
heaven broke through behind the prison walls
as they have experienced their work in prison ministry

Chuck Butler story (appendix)

- ² *Jesus taught them, saying:*
³ *"Happy are people who are hopeless,
because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.*
⁴ *"Happy are people who grieve,
because they will be made glad.*
⁵ *"Happy are people who are humble,
because they will inherit the earth.*
⁶ *"Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness,
because they will be fed until they are full.*
⁷ *"Happy are people who show mercy,
because they will receive mercy.*
⁸ *"Happy are people who have pure hearts,
because they will see God.*
⁹ *"Happy are people who make peace,
because they will be called God's children.*

¹⁰ "Happy are people whose lives are harassed
because they are righteous,
because the kingdom of heaven is theirs.

¹¹ "Happy are you when people insult you and harass you
and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you,
all because of me.

– Matthew 5:2-11

What does the LORD require from those
who worship, and love, and serve God?

To do justice
To love faithfully
To walk with a humble heart in God's sight

When we live this way, we can transform our world

(Response Prayer (from Micah 6, Matthew 5))

Chuck Butler and the Waseca Federal Prison

Chuck was a friend and a colleague who was a member of
the Iowa Conference of the United Methodist Church

Chuck was born down south

And at the end of WWII was stationed at Fort Benning

Eventually he answered God's call in his life

And became a missionary in Panama

He also served United Methodist churches in Alabama and Iowa

Chuck was a great guy, deeply spiritual, in love with Jesus

And had a tender heart.

The same was true for his wife Marilyn

After his retirement, we began hearing about
the *School of the Americas*

If you remember from about 25 years ago,

this is where our country

trained soldiers from Latin America

The trouble was that some of these soldiers

returned to their countries and did terrible things

Hundreds of people were killed, went "missing", or worse.

If you remember,

Chuck was a United Methodist Missionary in Panama

He knew these people, and the families of "the missing"

And Chuck learned that that the *School of the Americas*

Was located at his beloved Fort Benning

So, Chuck joins in a protest against the *School of the Americas*

And he got arrested

And he was told if he ever came back to protest,

They would throw him in prison

Well, If you have known a United Methodist pastor or two,

You know what comes next

A year later he returns for another protest.

What they did was lie in the street in front of Fort Benning
As through they were some of the hundreds of
“the missing” or the dead

Chuck and the others get arrested, loaded on buses
And brought to a city park where they are released

Except when Chuck gets off the bus,
He tells an officer that earlier they promised
to throw him in prison if he ever came back

Months later, he told the same story to judge

The judge agreed with Chuck
And sent him to the federal prison over in Wasceca

And that is when the story gets interesting

Chuck caused some trouble over there in Waseca

You see, he was a part of an accountable discipleship group
Down at Christ United Methodist in Rochester
That’s a group like the one we have that meets Tuesday evenings
The members of his group took it upon themselves to visit Chuck
Remember that line from Jesus,
I was in prison and you visited me

I think they took turns and a member of group visited him
just about each day

And you can guess that Chuck and Marilyn were also loved
By the members of Christ United Methodist
So, there were even more visitors who made the drive
To Waseca

It got so bad that the administration of the prison
Made a rule restricting who could visit him

Only his wife and his pastor
And since he was a United Methodist clergy, (now in Minnesota)
His pastor was not any of the pastors at Christ United Methodist
But the Bishop

But the problem with his visitors
Is not even the best part of the story

Do you remember to where Chuck was a missionary?
(Panama)

At the time, Waseca had a significant number
of Spanish speaking “guests”

And what do you think
a retired United Methodist pastor/missionary
would do in such a situation with lots of free time?

Start a Bible study

But it gets better

The inmates in this Bible study didn’t just hear the Good News
They began to live the Good News

They grew more and more in love with Jesus
They began to love one another and treat each other with respect

Think about Jesus’ teachings and Paul’s writings
And the subversive effect they’d have on a prison population

That place began to be transformed
A federal prison began to feel as if it was
A little taste of the kingdom of heaven on earth

Thy will be done, on earth as it in heaven

As you could guess,
the administration looked forward to the day
when they could release Chuck

The Federal Correctional Institution in Waseca, Minnesota
Was starting to feel like a nice place to be
Instead of a place where someone would be sent to be punished

Yeah, if I remember correctly, they let him out early,
Over the protests of Chuck

God Bless him
After his release,
Chuck became active in the
Prison Visitation Ministry over there.