

# **“The Beatitudes - Blessed are You!”**

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Matthew 5: 1-11 NRSV

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I was sitting at my parishioner's kitchen table. While she made the tea I was admiring her beautifully cross stitched piece on the wall—the Beatitudes. I started to read them and realized for the first time I that I never considered they were about me. At all. I always assumed they were about somebody else. A special elite spiritual forces group? Those Beatitudes were kind of intimidating. But as my hostess joined me again I thought about her story, and the obstacles she overcame, the losses she absorbed in her long life, and the kindness she kept in her heart, and I thought those Beatitudes had to be about her. But they still didn't feel like they were about me.

I'm glad to report that the last ten years of ministering, specifically with traumatized people inside and outside the church, gave me back the Beatitudes. They came off the wall and walked into my life. And I found myself among them, after all. Extraordinary events can do that, and I have a hunch we're in one now. Maybe it's time for the Beatitudes to come off your wall and into your life with the blessing you need now. So, let's go. First, we're going to back up the truck a little to see what started it all.

At this point in this Gospel of Matthew, the adult Jesus is just getting started in ministry. John the Baptist has baptized him, and Jesus has started preaching around, has called a few fishermen to follow him, and has begun to teach and to heal people. The text gives all this information, like a 'to do' list Jesus was working through. But then Matthew switches the lens. He starts to pick up the finer details of those healings. So here's the Beatitudes prompt verses, that don't go up anyone's wall. Matthew chapter 4:24 & 25.

These are diseases and calamities that would include suffering in body, mind, heart and spirit. Most of these people would have lived on the outside of their families and communities. They were sick, alone, shamed, poor, unable to participate in life, and afraid of what was going to happen to them. They lived every day with multiple levels of trauma and they could not hide it--- behind wealth or standing or other privilege. Later Jesus would meet some people with those resources to help cover their trouble, but here at the beginning the people who responded first were the most desperate with the least left to lose, and there were a lot of them.

No one knows what Jesus was expecting, but this is what he got. And maybe he was shaken by it. Because in the first verse of chapter 5 it says he saw the crowds, he went up a mountain and sat down. His brand new shiny disciples came to him. And Jesus started to teach. And what he taught them was the thing that would hold their feet to the fire of this ministry, and also show them they were in something brand new, something that was up to the misery and the trauma and the unfixable things they were going to meet every day. All the pain, all the lack of, all the injustice, all the powerlessness, all the swimming against the current people had to do in life, all the risks that virtue would require from them—what God was doing was up to all of it, and busy rewriting the ending with blessing.

These people who can't walk, having fits, whose families abandoned them, those in constant pain, mentally ill, these spiritually oppressed, these people on the outside of everything, who have nothing to offer us but their grief and fear and confusion and pain—these people, Jesus tells his disciples, are blessed. In this work of mine, he says, these people are blessed.

Yes, that crowd gathering down there, it's like a human disaster zone. They are everything we don't want to be, living in stories we don't want to ever tell ourselves. But I have the rest of their story, Jesus says. I know the ending. And it goes like this: a share in the kingdom of heaven, comforted, heirs of the earth, filled and satisfied, receiving mercy, seeing God, called God's children, heirs again in the kingdom of heaven, rewarded there. Blessed are you. For this is how it ends.

Maybe you are someone who has never needed to hear the words "it will not always be this hard." But you need them now. Maybe you are someone who never imagined that your careful and prudent planning would not be enough to emerge unscathed from this pandemic. And you need those words now. Maybe the wear and tear of it has left you less resilient to manage the non-pandemic news you have received from the doctor, or betrayal in your most important relationship, the daily challenges of sobriety, the sense of being overwhelmed by how much work the ministry here needs from you. And you need to hear those words now. It will not always be this hard. We are less resilient than we were. And sometimes at night in bed, it's scary.

As a trauma survivor supporting other trauma survivors to heal, and participate in life again, I can share a couple of things. The first is that we are diminished by the traumas we face in our lives. There are some things we lose. They are just gone. We don't get them back. And the second is

that we can also become more. Our lives are not the same, but they can, by the blessing of God at work, become more.

This passage called the beatitudes isn't about a special elite spiritual forces team. They are about us. Whatever we are losing, whatever is already gone, God has never stopped working on the new ending. The more that is waiting for us.

I've learned that God's blessing is not necessarily what we might have ordered up. It's not a retailer consumer kind of thing. It's about stepping inside God's story of a relentless love and unwavering commitment—and living there, in the blessing. Jesus was in that story, leading his shiny new disciples to face that human disaster zone, and do their best with God's love and commitment.

Ministry has always been marinating in trauma and responding to traumatized people because Jesus said they are blessed.

Right now, our resilience may be wearing thin, and our stress symptoms escalating. Our buffer zone may be shrinking, and our vulnerabilities more exposed. Or, maybe you're still okay, but someone you love is in trouble. Maybe someone you've met in the community is in that disaster zone already. Today we are taking the beatitudes off the wall and all they want to do is walk into your life.

in that scary moment when we find ourselves in the exact situation we never thought we would be in, or with someone else who's distress shakes us to the core, this story opens the curtain for us on Jesus showing up, right in our mess of pain and confusion and fear, seeing it clearly, and not turning away, not looking for someone a little tidier or even a little worse, just looking for us, so that when we need it most there we will hear "Blessed are you."

The woman I was visiting that day is gone now from this life. But I still hold her story with me. And that day in her kitchen, those cross stitched beatitudes started something in me that has brought me to this moment with you. Knowing with everything in me that 'Blessed am I' and 'Blessed are you.'

In the disasters of our lives, when nothing is right and maybe nothing can be made right again; we are diminished. And still God is at work, so we also become more. 'Blessed are you'. That's how this story ends. That's how it will always end. Now is the time for the Beatitudes to be about you, not only about somebody else. Take them off the wall and let them walk into your life:

For 'Blessed are you!'