

“Words of Jesus ... Beatitudes IV”

Prayer: *Holy God, we have come this morning to hear again the message of your steadfast love, reminding us that you haven't given up on us. For all our shortcomings, for all of the grief that we must cause you, we are thankful that you welcome us into you're your love and forgiveness with open arms. Speak to us again words of courage, strength, hope, compassion, and love. Amen.*

Peter Gomes, the long-time Pastor of Harvard's Memorial Church, died almost a year ago. In 1998 he wrote that when reading the Beatitudes we face two temptations. “The first is to regard the Beatitudes as a set of principles that might be considered a happier and much improved version of the Ten Commandments. Jesus is offering ‘carrot theology’ rather than ‘stick theology’. But they are not principles, but words of encouragement to ordinary people.

The second temptation is to postpone them into the future. But the message is in the present tense. Now, in this moment you will have happiness and joy. The Kingdom is already here.” (see *Sermons, Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living*, page 114) Still later Gomes writes “... We like the Beatitudes for here is a recipe for virtue, and if we read it right, use the right ingredients and in the right proportions, it is like we can cook like Julia Child, and who then will need Julia Child? Here is the rub, however. We have all been invited to dinner parties prepared by people who were tutored over the television by Julia Child, but somehow, we admit in our heart of hearts, despite all of the creamery butter, the leeks, and that French copper paraphernalia, the meal is not quite the same without Julia in the kitchen.

Once all is said and done, there is more person and personality than principle to cooking; and there is more person and personality than principle in the Beatitudes. The “personality” and person of the Beatitudes and hence so-called authority, rests in the person, the life of Jesus, and in the persons and lives of those who hear, believe and act. These principles without the person of their author and the person to whom they are addressed mean nothing at all. “ (see *Sermons, Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living*, page 115)

This morning, we are probing the sixth and seventh of the Beatitudes- “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God*” and “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*”

We love these words “the pure in heart” or as Phillips writes, “the utterly sincere, for they will see God!” ... we love knowing we can “see God”. The Greek word for “purity” used here is the word “kathiros”. It appears 27 times in the New Testament and signifies “that which is clean” ... and free from any contaminating substance. These Jews of the first century were obsessed with purity and the Law was full of detailed instructions about how they were to remain pure and they were “set apart” from all their Gentile neighbors. The religious leaders, especially the Pharisees, had devised a whole new set of laws for the people to follow.

But what does it mean to be “pure in heart”? The grandmothers and great-grandmothers would say quickly that to be pure in heart is to be child-like and trust and love everyone. A

child's intention is good, welcoming everyone with endless curiosity about the world. The child lives in the moment, not having yet learned about such qualities as jealousy and pride.

Here are the *Words of Jesus* saying that unless we become like a young child, we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Danish theologian Søren Kierkegaard has written (see *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*.) Purity is to be utterly open and sincere; to allow one's whole life to be transparent before God and others. J.B. Phillips writes, "Blessed are those who are utterly sincere".

Some of the circumstances of life bring us happiness while other events bring us deep sorrow and pain. And as Christians both happiness and sorrow rest on the bedrock that Jesus Christ suffered, died and rose from the dead and demonstrated our reconciliation to God. God will never take his eye from us and the face of God is always smiling upon you and me.

On the day of our Annual Meeting let me say that this congregation is the triumph of faith, not that we are perfect, but we share a faith that trusts in God's love.

We remember the name Dag Hammarskjöld, the Secretary-General of the United Nations. In one of his last writings, he wrote: "I don't know who—or what—put the question. I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer 'Yes' to Someone—or Something—and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, had a goal." (see *Markings*, page 205)

The meaning in that dark night of the soul is often beyond our understanding but we can trust in God's love. There is meaning beyond ourselves ... in my life and in your lives. Even in our later years, life is so much more than just coping and making adjustments. Mysterious as it may be, there is something awesome and magnificent at the heart of our existence, and it is about love. It is our love for God, love for one another, love for creation, love for life itself.

The Words of Jesus ... "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

Now, let's take up the next Beatitude: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*" In our Bible the word "peace" is a very comprehensive word and is central to the purposes of God. Typically we define peace as the absence of war, which is kind of crazy, because it implies that war is the normal state of things. No war is not the normal, ... peace is the normal state of things. War is the aberration, but typically we define peace as a negative: no war, no conflict, no terrorism, no anxiety.

On the other hand, the biblical word "peace" is always a positive. Peace is wholeness, state of accord, and experiences of harmony. It is harmony in our relationship to God and in all person to person relationships. This is what God longs for and it is what leads to the establishment of the kingdom of God.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus is the agent through whom God made it possible for us to live in harmony with each other and with God. We now have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and in turn, God calls us to live in peace with everyone. We are called to be peacemakers with our neighbors, our family, or even acquaintances in our HOA that might not cooperate.

For some this also means they march down the streets in protest of a war our country is involved in. Peacemakers build up; they do not tear down. They do not work at cross-purposes with God in people's lives. In their relationships with people, peacemakers do not gossip. They

do not demean and put down others. They do not set others up for failure. They do not discourage or make fun of others. Peacemakers do not fan the flames of hatred or conflict, but peacemakers edify, compliment, encourage, and inspire. They bear burdens, support and forgive others. They sympathize, are compassionate, and seek to understand. What peacemakers do is help others experience God's best.

Scholar Tom Long writes, that like the preamble of the *US Constitution*, the Beatitudes are like a preamble to the Good News. "The Beatitudes proclaim what is, in the light of the kingdom of heaven, unassailably true. They describe the purpose of every holy law, the foundation of every custom, the aim of every practice of this new society, this colony of the kingdom, the church called and instructed by Jesus. It becomes quickly apparent that the Beatitudes turn the world's values upside down. What is true for those who live in the power of the kingdom of heaven is a flat reversal of what is considered to be true in the culture at large." (see commentary *Matthew, Bible Companion Series*, page 57)

Imagine most television ads you will watch during the Super Bowl next Sunday ... and how the good life is pictured? We might even say, if we allow ourselves into the advertisement, happy are, or blessed are those who can afford luxury items. Blessed are those who look young and attractive and surrounded by good friends at a bar. Blessed are the mighty, the powerful, the famous, the self-reliant, for they have all the good things in life. And the Beatitudes are a nearly complete reversal of any television advertisement we can remember or imagine.

Thomas Long goes further and writes, "...that the church, the community of Christ, is a joyful people, but the source of their joy is not that they live easy lives in a happy world or that things are getting better every day, but that their trust is in God's coming kingdom." (see Long, page 47)

Jesus saw what we could see, but too often ignore. Jesus saw people in the crowd who were poor, both materially and in spirit, ... and people who are mourning. He saw the meek people and people who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and those who were persecuted. He saw people who were reviled and subject to false charges. Jesus not only saw these people he proclaimed them blessed ... the people the culture despised and ignored, Jesus blessed.

In our world Jesus sees the merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers. They do not always stand out in a crowd, but Jesus sees them, and pronounces them blessed. And through them God is at work in this world and will surely bring all creation to a time of peace and rejoicing.

Now, we know that peacemakers often get called by other names. Long-haired hippies, some called those protesting the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Fuzzy-headed dreamers, those who protested the nuclear arms race were called. What do we call the grandmothers and grandfathers who stand on the corner of Bell Road at 99th Ave. proclaiming peace? You may say that I'm a dreamer and Jesus says the name that matters is that peacemakers "*will be called children of God.*"

In this life, here and now, we have beautiful glimpses of what it means to be pure in heart and to see God. We see God in the laughter of children, in the blooms of spring, in the neighbor who brings a casserole when we need help. But we also see God in the family who gathers around a dying member, sharing stories, laughter, and tears, ... and perhaps most of all, in the face of the one who lies there, so much closer to seeing God face to face than we are. "*For now we see in a mirror dimly; then we will see face to face.*"

The **Words of Jesus** “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*” ... and “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*”

Peter Gomes has written: “The gospel of Jesus Christ comes down to a rather simple proposition for ordinary people like you and like me. If God is to be known, that knowledge will be in the lives of the ordinary people who are redeemed by his extraordinary message of love. What the world knows of God, it will know through us, for better or for worse, we are the good news, the gospel, we are the light of the world ... and we dare not wait for more qualified Christians, better prayers, or better rules to come along and do our shining for us. No, the work of God awaits our hands, the love of God awaits our hearts, and people of God await our fellowship here and now, ordinary and imperfect though we may be.” (p. 119).

The **Words of Jesus** “*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.* ... and “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*”

Scriptures: Genesis 1:24-28a, Matthew 5:1-12 (Phillips)