



WEEKLY STUDY July 23-29, 2023

(Use this guide to individually or with a group dive deeper into this week's sermon.)

Beatitudes – Week Three

Our sermon series for July is: Beatitudes: A Series on the Blessed Practices of Jesus. These statements in Matthew and Luke call us to remember who is blessed in the kingdom of God. Pastor Sam has invited all of us to entire sermon on the mount in Matthew, chapters 6 and 7. We are to consider how the nine statements of blessing reveal to us the characteristics of kingdom people.

Our scripture this week is:

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” **Matthew 5:5**

“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled.” **Luke 6:21a**

- 1) We are now in our fourth week with the Beatitudes. Pastor Sam reminded us that in the Gospel of Luke all speak to the literal socioeconomic conditions people were facing in Jesus' time – and sadly they continue to face today. To recap (including this week's passage) they are:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

In each, we have a reminder of the very real hard things people are dealing with as they live their lives. And with each one, Jesus offers hope with the promise of what they can expect. Implied with each is the assurance to people that in whatever hard thing they are experiencing, they are understood and not alone.

Question: In what very real circumstances of hurt or pain or sorrow or economic distress or lack of nourishment have you felt seen, heard, understood and cared for by another person, faith friends, your church? What helped you?

- 2) There is more than one joke floating around about United Methodists and meals. For one I remember, the punchline involves someone thinking the symbol for the United Methodist Church was a casserole dish. But, based on Pastor Sam's sermon on Sunday reminding us of both the heavenly banquet, and the number of time we are reminded

of the hospitality, the fellowship of meals and the very real satisfying our hunger in scripture. Perhaps a casserole dish really is a fitting symbol of the church. Food nourishes our body and food received in the fellowship of others nourishes are sense of belonging, of being cared for, of feeling valued.

Question: Think of some memorable meals that you have had as part of a church fellowship. What made those memorable? What were you able to receive in sharing those meals? What were you able to give to another?

- 3) Moving to the Gospel of Matthew, once again the beatitude is different from the Gospel of Luke. Quoting Matthew: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” Pastor Sam pointed to the importance of the word “righteousness” in Matthew, telling us that the word is used 7 times in Matthew and 5 of those times is in the Sermon on the Mount. Often on Sunday, Sam will talk about something that sends me to a book I’ve read because it triggers an associated memory. This time it was a book by Amy-Jill Levine, *Sermon on the Mount: a Beginner’s Guide to the Kingdom of Heaven.* She says, “To demand righteousness, which is related, linguistically, to the term for ‘justice,’ should also bring us to mercy. Justice without mercy is intolerable, but mercy without justice is equally intolerable...” As Sam said, “Righteousness is practicing and teaching the commands Jesus has given in the sermon on the mount. Righteousness is something that you do.” Too often we turn righteousness into simply feeling right or correct about something (and perhaps a bit superior about it as well). Remembering the link to justice and mercy reminds us that it is an action. And we are all charged with action to bring about justice.

Question: Think about those you know in our faith community at Belle Meade UMC. Who would you name as someone you see as hungering and thirsting for righteousness? What actions do you see that help you understand the actions that point to hungering and thirsting for righteousness?

- 4) Coming back to the word that echoes through the beatitudes – “blessed” – Pastor Sam encouraged us all to know and believe that we are blessed. She talked about the power of giving and receiving blessings, and told us that the words preserved on the oldest scrap of Scripture existing are the words of the blessing of Aaron in Numbers 6 – “The Lord bless you and keep you.” Sam pushed us beyond ourselves with these words, “blessed people bless people.” I have a pastor friend who when he gives the benediction at the end of a service always says, “Do you know that you are blessed?” He then waits to hear the congregations shout out, “Yes!” He follows by saying, “This blessing isn’t just for you, but is for all. Go out to be a blessing to all you meet.” Being a blessing is hard work! It means noticing others. Noticing needs. Acknowledging needs. Addressing needs.

Question: What helps you know and believe you are blessed? How can you bless others day by day?

Prayer: “Blessed God, You who blessed us remind us that we continue and embody those blessings in the way we act and speak. Expand our view of righteousness. Help us see the

importance of justice not just when we feast at your heavenly banquet, but in our daily actions now. Open our eyes to see the blessings others are delivering in a world where many are in need and are hurting. Strengthen us to speak out and DO what is just not for ourselves alone, but for all of your creation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen"

Weekly Challenge: This week once again read chapters 5-7 in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke 6:17-49. Select one thing to do this week to help those who are hungry in our community.

(Weekly study guide prepared by Rev. MaryJane Pierce Norton)