



Sermon, January 20, 2019  
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Coburg and Junction City United Methodist Churches

Sermon Series 2019: "Okay, Jesus, Now What?"

## **"Oh, to Be Happy! Part 2"**

### **Scripture:**

Matthew 5:1-12 NRSV:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### **Review**

- **Dessert First: Begin with Blessedness**
- **Jesus opening the suitcase of Grace, pulling out the keys to the kingdom of heaven.**
- **How to be open to receive these keys? Emptiness**
- **Story of the seeker, the religious teacher, and the overflowing cup of tea: empty yourself first.**

**Today: We are going to follow this idea of being emptied in order to receive the realm of God or of Heaven. But first, let's pause and consider just what Jesus is doing here in the Beatitudes and Sermon on the Mount.**

**Think about what it is like to be a high school coach who begins the season with a full team of raw beginners. The coach knows that each young person has the athletic potential of being a valuable team member, and of performing very exacting athletic moves and plays. But**

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training is required. Training involves disciplining the body, strengthening the body, developing responses and reflexes that become automatic, overcoming any internal dialogue that says “I can’t do this,” eliminating the ego-directed sense of “I am the most important player,” and replacing it with “I am an integral part of a team and I submit myself to assist the team’s accomplishments to the fullest of my ability.”

A good coach knows that the mind and the heart and the body work together to create the full person, so each of these must be dealt with. Drills are run to emphasize teamwork. Plays are explained so the players understand what is to be accomplished by them, and the coach continually gives pep talks to stir up desire in each player to give it all for the team. As the team members work together and achieve success in running the plays, and winning games, or experiencing the thrill of well-executed plays, they experience in their bodies a thrill and euphoria that further reinforces the coach’s message of what can be accomplished by working together as a team, and giving your all for the team.

Jesus is doing the same thing here. First and foremost, his goal is to help all who follow his Path to achieve the bigger mind and higher or expanded consciousness that is our birthright and which exists within each of us *as our potential way of being*. So, he provides us with exercises, techniques, practices, and changes to our accustomed way of thinking and behavior to cultivate the growth of this higher consciousness. One of the first things we have to do is to die to ourselves, that is, to move our ego from the center of control, and from thinking we are the star of the show, it’s our way or the highway, that we are God’s gift to the world.

Paul describes it this way: “<sup>19</sup> For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; <sup>20</sup> and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:19-20).”

Let’s see how this plays out in the last four of the Beatitudes:

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1. “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” So how do we do this? Jesus goes on to give some very concrete examples of how this emptying occurs. One example of emptying relates to divesting ourselves of our grab for control or power or possession of others. Mercy is an example of this. Mercy can be many things, such as an act of compassion or charity towards the poor or those who are vulnerable or have no power. Mercy means letting go of the need to control another person by pronouncing judgment or punishment upon them. Jesus also indicates that there is a principle of reciprocity at work here. At a later point in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” What you want to happen in the world to you, do that yourself. Those who sow mercy in the world will reap mercy. Mahatma Gandhi phrased something very similar when he said, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Start now to create the kind of world you want to live in.
2. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” But then Jesus goes a little further. Don’t just create the world you want to see, create the world God wants to see. To see God means to also perceive what God desires for the world. But in order to do this, we need to have an empty heart – a heart that is emptied of all the muck and junk that our culture and world want to put there. Jesus lists these things as things which defile us: evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly (Matthew 7:21-22). These are the things we need to put out of our hearts and minds in order to see God.
3. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” We can also translate “peacemakers” as “peace-doers.” The social reformer A. J. Muste frequently said, “there is no way to peace, peace is the way.” Doing peace is directly related to doing justice, as Micah reminds us. Justice and mercy are best manifested by considering the needs and situations of others as being as important as our own. This requires a certain emptying of our need to be ahead of everyone else, or in control of the lives and property of others. This is how we “do” peace. Ultimately this is rooted in having compassion for

others – literally to feel the suffering and struggles of other people. Compassion moved everything Jesus did.

4. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This connects with the following:
5. “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” What happens when we begin to have compassion and show mercy to others, and if we start to let go of the need to have power and control over others is that we inevitably encounter opposition from the world and others in society. This is because our society – just like the world at Jesus’ time - is built on the exercise of power and the accumulation of possessions, especially the possessions of others. Everything we use in our lives, from the food we eat to the rare minerals in our computers to the diamonds in our rings to the gas in our cars comes from someone else’s land. There is always a cost to this. This is true throughout history. When we begin to move ourselves out of this pattern of life we will be perceived as a threat to the way things are. Jesus knew this. He experienced the opposition of those who were invested in the status quo, the exercise of power, the control of people’s lives and bodies. He said, “As they have persecuted me, so will they persecute you.” But it must be done because we are seeking this life of righteousness, this life of emptying ourselves in order to prepare room for God.

There is a story about a famous sculptor of elephants who lived in India. One day a reporter asked him how achieved such lifelike depictions of elephants. The sculptor replied, “It is easy. I look at the stone, and I chisel away everything that is not elephant.” In order to make room for the realm of heaven in our lives, we need to empty our hearts of everything that is not heaven. That is the key to true happiness. Now we are ready to play on the Team, and we are Ready for the Big Game: the Game of Life.