

Exodus 20:8-11

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work - you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Matthew 5:1-12

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.

Sermon

What do you value? What has worth in your life?

Jesus looks out over the crowd that has gathered and he is compelled to share a longer message with them, but he begins with sharing his values, at his core what matters to Jesus most. We have come to name this first section of the sermon on the mount the beatitudes.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, the spiritual beggars, those who find themselves on their knees before the Lord, dependent on God's grace. At one level, the spiritual beggars are those who are at the fringes of society, those who have been rejected or relegated to inferiority by the community. They are the desperate and the depleted, those who have nothing left but God. We think often of those who are physically or mentally ill, those who have lost everything and those who are simply lost.

Blessed are those who mourn: those who understand loss deeply. This is not just the mourning of death, but this is the one who looks and sees the great divide between the way the world is and the way God intends for it to be. Those who mourn understand the brokenness and seeks to repair the breach.

Blessed are the meek, not the mighty. Meekness is not so much about timid passiveness, but more the bold claim that the way of the sword only leads to more swords, but that non-violent resistance, patience and enduring trust in God are so much more powerful.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who desire good. This is not about a self-serving good, but a sacrificial one. This is a passion for justice, a want for the other to be lifted up and made strong, this is generous love for our neighbors.

Blessed are the merciful, those who believe forgiveness is more important than punishment. Mercy is another word that normally is a sign of weakness in contradiction with justice. Yet Jesus never places justice and mercy far from one another. God's justice is rooted in grace and mercy, and it is when we recognize our own forgiveness from God that we see the need for us to be merciful with one another.

Blessed are the pure in heart, those who are their true selves. At one level this is simple the person who is genuine, that their inner being and outer being are one and the same. But there is something more about the purity that has to do about ones faith. The pure in heart is one who lives out their faith in a way that is both real and open to growing and changing. They are able to be honest with what they believe and where they are still searching.

Blessed are the peacemakers: the restorers of relationships. Conflict, by its very nature derives from broken relationships, disagreements, inequities, unresolved injustices. All

of these cause chaos and disruption in our world and in our daily lives. The peacemaker is the one who seeks to fill the breach and bring us back into a right relationship. These are the dreamers who see a better tomorrow, and the troublemakers who stand against the powers that find profit in conflict and chaos.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, those whose work for good bring harm to their personal life. When someone stands against those who use their power and wealth and words to separate, harm, and devalue another's life, those powers do not sit ideally but nor quickly change. They lash out, frighten and intimidate, seeking to silence any opposition.

Blessed are you, when you stand in faith, when you stand for love and grace, mercy and hope, even when it is hard and frightening and threatening to do so.

The beatitudes are an introduction to Jesus' vision of the kingdom of heaven. A declaration of who the citizens of that kingdom are. And if we are citizens of Christ's kingdom, then we find our happiness, our joy in the current and future reality of Jesus' love and embrace. May we live as citizens of Christ's kingdom and find joy in the work that we are called to be a part of in this one. Thanks be to God. Amen