

## **BLESSED ARE WE**

**Reflections on Matthew's Gospel by Janet Parks**

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In today's Gospel, we are given a direct, clear message from Jesus on how to live in His Kingdom and the wondrous outcomes we can expect if we follow His message. Jesus is focused on the downtrodden, the marginalized, the victims of oppression and persecution. Not on what they're doing wrong but what makes who they are and what they stand for so right. Like most Gospel passages, this one is as real and relatable today as it was 2000 years ago. Especially lately, when the news nearly every day rattles our spirits, crushes our hearts, confuses our brains, and brings many of us to our knees.

According to Rev. Matt Tebbe, The Sermon on the Mount has been described as Jesus' "political manifesto". Jesus was early in his ministry – traveling through Galilee, with his disciples, healing, preaching, gaining listeners and followers. At the time, most

Israelites (95%) lived in poverty. They were farmers and laborers, at best. They lived hand to mouth. They were powerless and stuck in a system that kept them poor, destitute, and off limits to blessings and prosperity. And Jesus was living like they did – homeless, relying on others to feed him.

Many religious leaders in Jesus' day (the other 5%) used the law of the Torah to gain power; to hurt others and help themselves. Jesus provided another way to be a faithful Jew, to love justice for the sake of others, not incur religious or economic oppression at the expense of others.

And so, here is Jesus. On a mountain top. Preaching, teaching LOVE and HAPPINESS. (For to be blessed is to be happy.) Blessed are the poor in spirit, the merciful, the compassionate, the peacemakers. FOR THEY SHALL SEE GOD. THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

Imagine the disciples and the crowd of listeners eager to hear Jesus when he spoke these words. Imagine their realization that by His

declaration, they are worthy human beings. Worthy of love. Worthy of happiness. Jesus declared it so and they believed him. I'm so grateful to Jesus for doing this brave thing! To Matthew for writing this gospel of love and hope. I'm grateful to Jesus' followers for remembering the words and living them and passing them on to generation after generation.

Retired Presiding Bishop Michael Curry wrote that when you are persecuted because you tried to stand for love and compassion and decency – you are blessed. When you seek justice, and when you love even your enemies...you are the light of the world, the salt of the earth.

The pages of history are filled with heroes of the Beatitudes, who lived the Beatitudes as witnesses to God's love. We know many by name: Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Harriett Tubman, Jane Addams (social reformer), Anne Frank, Corrie Ten Boom, Harvey Milk (gay rights activist), and Mother Teresa. And there are many we

don't know much about except their kind acts of selfless love and compassion made a difference. God knows who they were or currently are and who YOU are – the farmer who helped his ailing neighbor bale hay, the teachers who keep snacks in their classrooms and discreetly share them with hungry students, the factory employee who spends her lunch break tutoring a fellow worker hoping to get their GED, the millions now over time who have marched, picketed, rallied on street corners or peacefully sat in solidarity for justice. Small stuff and very big stuff. Love in action. Sometimes – often – that love is up against very serious and dangerous issues: war, corruption, tyranny.

Episcopal priest Diana Wilcox wrote: “The beatitudes are about transformation, not just of the world, but of ourselves – a transformation that is life giving – but begins in vulnerability. For it is when we are poor in spirit, when we mourn in pain for those we lost, or what we see happening in the world, that is when Christ's

light seeps through the cracks of our soul to give life to our beating heart, and we hunger and thirst for righteousness. That is where we will find the comfort we seek.“

Let us be Christ's light. Amen.