



Jesus Counts Your Blessings – TouchPoint for October 28, 2020

Matthew 5:1-12 (MSG) ¹⁻² When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. This is what he said:

³ “You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

⁴ “You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

⁵ “You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less. That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

⁶ “You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat.

⁷ “You’re blessed when you care. At the moment of being ‘care-full,’ you find yourselves cared for.

⁸ “You’re blessed when you get your inside world—your mind and heart—put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

⁹ “You’re blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That’s when you discover who you really are, and your place in God’s family.

¹⁰ “You’re blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God’s kingdom.

¹¹⁻¹² “Not only that—count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens—give a cheer, even!—for though they don’t like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble.

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are those who mourn...Blessed are the meek...the merciful....”

The other day I was over at some friends’ house, socially distancing of course. And in the midst of talking about the frustration of 2020 I made the comment to them that life still seemed good and that I was feeling truly blessed if I just stopped and thought about it. You know, if I just stopped and counted my blessings. And I started listing some of the ways I felt blessed.

Funny thing though, I didn’t list any of the things Jesus lists in today’s bible passage. I didn’t list poverty of spirit. In fact, I usually bemoan those dry times in my faith life. I didn’t list mourning, crying, after all sadness is not something I’m thankful for. I didn’t list being meek, I usually list being confident and feeling strong. And hungering and thirsting for anything, “No thank you”, I much prefer to be full and satiated in any situation.

So obviously, between me and Jesus, one of us has the wrong idea about what it means to be blessed. Anyone want to wager on who that might be? Or maybe we are both wrong, and we should just adopt a “Be Happy Attitude” as Robert Schuller once wrote. You know, if we just have the right attitude, we can get out of all those situations in which Jesus calls us blessed. Now, maybe in one respect, Schuller was on to something. Our human tendency does not want to be in those situations Jesus calls blessed. So “Be-Happy your Attitude” right out of them.

Let’s face it, the people Jesus calls blessed are the kind of people we least want to be.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit...Blessed are those who mourn...Blessed are the meek...the merciful....”

This coming Saturday is Halloween... Trust me, there is a tie-in here.

Halloween is a fun holiday, a time to dress up and be something you’re not. It’s fun to do every now and then, but then we all know it’s time to get back to being an adult and getting serious. Putting back on our big boy and big girl clothes.

But as I reflect on the beatitudes this day, I begin to wonder if I’ve got some masks and costumes that run a little deeper than Halloween in my life.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit” uh...I don't think so...I don't think I would be up here if I was poor in spirit. I don’t think I would have gotten this job if on the application for Spiritual Director I wrote, “I’m pretty much spiritually poor and bankrupt.” Yeah, it can get tiring sometimes to never be able to say, “I don't know” or “I am weak in that area of faith” but it's just best to not admit it and put on my best face possible. You know, my best 'spiritual giant' mask.

“Blessed are those who mourn.” I don't know if Jesus knows this or not, but “Big boys don't cry.” Especially strong Christian ones whose faith can handle anything. No, it's best I not show any tears and put on my best face possible ... you know, my best 'joyful Christian' mask.

“Blessed are the meek.” Not in this culture. The Alpha male is the only way to go. Name it and claim it. Seize the day. ABC – always be closing. No. it's best I not show any weakness or meekness. I need to put on my best face possible...You know, my best “Triumphant Christian” mask.

“Blessed are the peacemakers.” Yeah. Good luck with that.

I could go on and on...but you get the picture. I sometimes wonder if the hillside Jesus was speaking on didn't look like the day after a Halloween party after he was done with these words. With masks and costumes scattered everywhere.

These beatitudes go to the heart and soul of us. They lay bare the games we play in the world to dominate, control, and lord over. But they also give us a space to catch our breaths. Those masks and costumes can get heavy. The burden of pretending to be perfect by the world's standards is a heavy burden to bear.

And so, to hear that those who are blessed are those who live from a different worldview just seems too good to be true. Yeah, I may be exhausted from all the running I'm doing in this rat-race, but it's too hard to imagine an alternative. And even if I could, I'm not sure I want to be one who mourns, who is poor in spirit, or who hungers and thirsts for anything, much less righteousness. Yeah, they may have a blessedness about them. They might even have a peace that passes all understanding. But if that is what you have to go through to get it, I'm not sure I want it.

But perhaps that is the point. Especially for the first four beatitudes. Those who are blessed are those who I seriously doubt chose their circumstances. And yet, they are the ones who are blessed. Not because of

their circumstance, but because God has met them in the depths of life. And they are open to the Presence.

This Sunday is All Saints Sunday. The beatitudes are always the Gospel reading for this day. And I think in my early days I always heard these words as prescriptive. You know, if I wanted to be blessed, I had to act a certain way – be a certain way.

But these days, I hear these words more as descriptive... Because if I were to tell you who are the saints in my life now, who are the heroes of my faith, they are described very clearly by Jesus' words today. I have said it before, and I will say it again, the saints in my life these days are those who have been through some pretty awful stuff in their lives. From grief for the loss of a love through death or divorce...through fear and doubt in the face of an illness...to simple acknowledgment of powerlessness in the face of an addiction. And it is in going through those things, and experiencing those first four beatitudes firsthand, the poverty of spirit and mourning, that they have become the people of the last four beatitudes. People of mercy, and peace, and purity of heart.

And maybe that is why the words that immediately follow the beatitudes are Jesus saying that these people are “The salt of the earth.” These people are the “light of the world.” Not the alpha male, superman, strong Christian know-it-all I strive so hard to be, or pretend to be.

And so, when I hear these words from Jesus, and see the lives of the saints in my life, some of those masks I wear start slipping, or become loose. Some even begin to fall off, even as I hold on to them tightly.

There is something incredibly gracious and freeing in these words of Jesus. There is something incredibly comforting. There is a blessedness in being human. In the totality of the human experience. Not just in the ups but the downs of life. Not just in the successes but the failures of life. Not just in the feast of life but in the famine times as well. God is present. God is blessing.

It's easy to feel blessed when you have a bunch of blessings to count, but what about the opposite. What then? Well, here is what the saints tell us:

That when all the blessings we take delight in counting are stripped away,

When it is just you and God at the core of your being, and you stand naked before God...then...then...

Then there is a blessedness that is too big to count because you are not the one doing the counting, instead, you are the one being counted...

And that makes all the difference.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they are counted among those in the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they are counted among the comforted.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they are counted among the fed.

And blessed are you, because you count. Especially in your moments of doubt and struggle, pain and darkness.

You see, you don't need to count your blessings,

because you've been counted as a blessing.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

Be Still, know that I am God.

Children of the Heavenly Father

Children of the heavenly Father, safely in his bosom gather. Nestling bird nor star in heaven, such a refuge e're was given. God his own doth tend and nourish, in His Holy courts they flourish. From all evil things he spares them, in His mighty arms He bears them. Neither life nor death shall ever, from the Lord, His children sever. Unto them His grace he showeth and their sorrows all he knoweth. Though He giveth or He taketh, God His children ne're forsaketh. His the loving purpose solely, to preserve them pure and holy.

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

The Lord's Prayer

The Meal

Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God

Create in me a clean heart, O God. And renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free spirit.

Benediction

The Lord Bless You and Keep You

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord lift His countenance upon you. And give you peace...The Lord make his face to shine upon you. And be gracious unto you. The Lord be gracious, gracious unto you. Amen