

Title: Good News you will Never Forget

Matthew 4:23-5:12

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (read 26-31)

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Matt 4:23-5:12 (NSRV)

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the *good news of the kingdom* and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

1 When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and after He sat down, His disciples came to Him. 2 He opened His mouth and began to teach them, saying,

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

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

10 “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 (NSRV)

18 For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. **19** For it is written,

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? **21** For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. **22** For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, **23** but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, **24** but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. **25** For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

26 Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. **27** But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; **28** God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, **29** so that no one might boast in the presence of God. **30** He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, **31** in order that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

When something very significant happens, you remember it. Good or bad. We have all experienced such moments. Those who lived when men first walked on the moon or during the assassination of JFK remember the event, and often exactly what they were doing. I personally don't have those experiences, but I remember precisely what I was doing when the US won the 1980 hockey match against the Soviets in the Olympics, what I was doing in college the day the Berlin wall fell, and my entire day on 9-11.

One particular event stands out. In middle school and high school in Central Florida in the early 1980s, we knew when fire drills would be scheduled. Every space shuttle launch we would be outside five minutes before, and we could see the shuttle rise from 50 miles away. It was an amazing sight. At my church, several people worked for the space program. Well, I moved to Phoenix in the summer of 1985. The next shuttle launch, an important launch that included a teacher among its crew, was to launch in January 1986. It felt strange to not see it that day, but one proceeds. I remember walking into my 3rd period English class only to find out the shuttle had just recently exploded. I will never forget that day.

Memorable moments are both positive and negative, collective and personal. We have many positive moments, such as Weddings, Birth of Children, and Baptisms.

The people from today's passage in Matthew who were there would always remember what happened and what Jesus said. Those gathered on the hill around the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum to hear Jesus speak would never forget what he said.

Jesus has gathered quite a crowd, and legend about him spread throughout the region. Jesus was based in Capernaum and traveled all around the region around Galilee, healing, preaching, and being involved in a number of honor challenges, all further increasing his reputation. Matthew narrates the amazing things happening around Jesus, and now he opens up the story to show us an

example of a day for Jesus. A day where Jesus, likely near Capernaum has a crowd gathering and the group settles on the sloping hillside nearby.

Today's passage comes from the well-known Sermon on the Mount. Likely this day was fairly common for Jesus, and Matthew's memory might be a mixture of multiple days, and yet anyone who was there would agree the story was authentic.

Imagine the crowds. Take a closer look at the crowds, and look at the individual people. We see those who are poor, sick, who live day to day, those who maybe have tried to do right or to have people come together and have crushed by those less ethical, those overlooked, those who try to bring people together and then have others take advantage of being vulnerable. One visualization might be what Paul writes to Corinthian Church:

1 Corinth 1:26: "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth."

There were those who had means both in Corinth and likely in this crowd, but they were simply part of the larger represented community.

Why were they there? After all, many of them would sacrifice greatly by not working on that day. What would have brought them to see Jesus as part of this crowd?

Jesus was talking about the Kingdom of Heaven is now breaking into the kingdom of the earth. Lets step back for a moment. What is "Kingdom"? It can be defined as the range of your effective will. So everyone individual has a kingdom. Kids learn very early the word "mine". And issues come up when the kingdom of two kids comes into conflict. And then kids come in conflict with the kingdom of the parents.

The kingdom of God or of Heaven is the range of God's effective will. And Jesus is preaching that the kingdom of Heaven is coming to earth. A light into the darkness. And the kingdom of Earth does not welcome things. And how would most in the crowd think things on the

Kingdom of Earth are going? Likely not that well. I think we might have some similar perspectives.

Later in this sermon on the mount, as it is known, Jesus will teach his disciples to pray with the early line “Father, who art in heaven,Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven”. God’s kingdom is breaking in from up there to down here on Earth, where things are as God wants them to be. Powerful words that we say often and may not understand the power and subversive nature of these statements.

When Jesus talks about good news of the kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, he is discussing life now, not simply focusing on something after you die. Life after death is important, and absolutely part of Jesus’ and the early church’s message, but it also is about here and now.

God’s kingdom, how God wants things to be, is breaking in. This sounds like good news, but listen abit further. It gets personal.

Jesus comes up to a place up the hill to talk to the crowds, and maybe even is talking with a few people (expand) who would never be found among the important spiritual leaders and says (Matt 5:3)

“Blessed are the spiritual zeros--the spiritually bankrupt and deficient, the spiritual beggars, those without a wisp of 'religion', for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”

in other words, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. I rather like this translation / expansion by Dallas Willard clarifying what is meant by “poor in spirit”.

Certainly something no religious community would choose as an ideal for their community, and we cannot see Jesus saying we should all strive to be “poor in spirit” or better, “spiritual zeros”.

I need to pause for a moment. Many of you would recognize this verse as coming from the Beatitudes, the starting verses of the Sermon on the Mount. And some of you might have been taught that Jesus was going up on a mountain like Moses to give a new law to the people. Some

people like to call the Beatitudes the “Be Attitudes” and that one should live along these principles. People put these verses on their walls as a guideline of how to live.

And yet, that is not what is going on in this passage. The Greek text has the capabilities to say these things, and yet, that is not what it is doing. Jesus does not start his gathering by just giving us more rules to follow. No one in the crowd that day would take it that way. These sayings are a form of Jewish blessing sayings that intentionally turn the world as expected upside down, typical of the 300 years before Jesus was born that the hearers would be familiar hearing. It follows a form of Blessing sayings where the world as we understand it has been turned upside down.

So what is going on? Many in the crowd would have been considered “spiritual zeros” by the leading Jewish community. The leaders in the community are the ones people consider as blessed. They would never expect to be called blessed.

And those who heard it will never forget being called blessed.

Can’t you just visualize the reaction? What did he say? He is calling me blessed? No one ever has ever called me blessed. And you know what he said would be memorable; no need to write this down as it is happening. Not a one of those who heard it will ever forget being called blessed.

Can’t you see everyone who is there just encouraging Jesus to say something else? Come on Jesus, say something further.

Then about a woman who had no children, husband just died, no where to go, who has lost all she has, and Jesus starts

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”

and you see transformations, and those around Jesus are getting even more excited.

The business partner who always brought people together, but ended up at the bottom...

The woman who always tried to do right, but fell behind those who played in the gray zones...

And we could go through each of these statements of Blessings. And can't you just see the excitement at the surprising good news.

Blessed, Blessed, Blessed.

Good news, all of you who thought you had no hope of being in the kingdom, yes, it is available to you.

Blessed, Blessed, Blessed.

Good news, all of you who thought you had been excluded, those that had been left by the world, told you can not contribute, or no hope of being in the kingdom on this earth, yes, it is available to you.

Blessed, Blessed, Blessed.

Everyone is welcome; everyone has value, both in this life and in the next.

What about those who were among those who were considered blessed by society already? Well, the kingdom comes to you as well. We know there were many who were of means, particularly women, who were important in funding Jesus' ministry. There were people of power who supported Jesus. All were invited and welcome into the Kingdom of Heaven. All means all, where everyone is radically welcomed.

What an amazing vision, a vision that still connects today. Those who feel they don't belong hear these words as Good News. I believe these words are so essential for our world today. The church today should be about the business of bringing in the kingdom of Heaven to earth. What would this look like now? Who would be surprised to be called blessed and important today?

Blessed are the fashion challenged,
those not up on the latest social phenomena,
the nerds and those who struggle using their cell phone and social media,
those whom society say is overweight or underweight, ...

Good news, yes, God's kingdom comes to you. You are blessed and loved.

Blessed are the single parents,
the immigrants,
the LGBTQIA individuals who religiously do not belong or are second-class citizens

Good news, yes, God's kingdom comes to you. You are blessed and loved.

I'm not hearing anyone being excluded.

And then it gets more serious.

Blessed are those abandoned by the world, those who have been told they don't matter.
Those who live in the margins in our societies.
Those who have been abandoned by their families.
Those who are drug addicted or held back by other addictions.

And yet in these cases, there is Good news: God's kingdom comes to you.

You are of great worth to the one who made the universe.

Each and every one of you are riotously celebrated and valued in the Kingdom of Heaven.

And you wonder why Christianity has often been called a religion of the poor, the women, the outcast? Why Christianity has been considered subversive and the bible and Christianity has been banned by many dictators particularly over the last 100 years? There is one who stands and says your value is not about your skills, what you bring to the world, your wealth, your fame. No. Each and every person is valued because God made you and God wants this world to become the kingdom of God where things operate according to the justice and mercy that God intended.

Good news.

God's kingdom comes to each and every one of you. Right in this place, and you can be transformed in this place.

Blessed, blessed, blessed. Jesus starts his sermon on the mount, which likely was typical of Jesus' preaching, by stating everyone is welcome. If you are the person no one expects in the church, come. You are riotously celebrated. If you have grown up in church all your life. Come, you are absolutely welcome.

In this Kingdom we are to do likewise wherever we can. This community is to be a blessing to each other and particularly to those outside. Our hands bring the kingdom of God. All of our hands. Take a moment and think can you bless around our community. That empathizing might mean bringing healing, bringing comfort to those who mourn, to help correct injustice, to welcome those around us. Here is the thing: the very person you want to exclude for human reasons is exactly the person Jesus says you too are blessed, just as Jesus says you are blessed. And there lies the challenge.

God's kingdom comes to each of you. Blessed are you, just as you are, not in spite of who you are, but because of who you are. Remember you are God's memorable moment.

Communion Statement:

We come to the table as the embodiment of the beloved community, the kingdom of heaven now in this world. A light has come into the darkness, and the darkness has not, and will not, overtake it.

At this table, we come together in community processing the community that Jesus started, a community formed by gatherings like the Sermon on the Mount. A community where all are welcome. Everyone, each and every one of you, are welcome at this table. Come. Come.

Benediction:

Christ calls each of you blessed. Each and every one of you is precious in God's eyes. Each of you has amazing possibilities bringing in the Kingdom of Heaven to this world, a world, who so incredibly needs the light of Christ brought into it.

So GO, and be the hands and feet of Christ in a world that so needs the hope of the beloved community.

Call to Worship (Adapted from Matthew 5)

Two leaders...

(less inclusive language)

Welcome are those one would never expect in church, and those who others don't think you belong in church, for the kingdom of heaven is for you.

(God invites us...) Welcome are those who have suffered loss, experienced tragedy, or don't know how you will make it to tomorrow, for you will be comforted and blessed in the kingdom of heaven.

(beloved community)

Welcome are those the successful of the world assume are unimportant, for in the Kingdom of Heaven you will inherit the world.

Welcome are those who the world mistakes their mercy and kindness for weakness, for you will be honored in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Welcome are those who get taken advantage by others as they try to build bridges, for God will call you his children in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Welcome are who do not get ahead because they sacrifice for others and attempt to do what is right, for you will be filled more than you ever can imagine in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Welcome are those, who seeking to live in peace, are excluded, who are persecuted, and who don't have a place at the table with others, for you will be gloriously celebrated in the kingdom of heaven.

(Let us prayer....)

Welcome to everyone in the Kingdom of Heaven where God is setting things right as they were always intended. The Kingdom of Heaven is not welcome by the Kingdom of Earth, either in biblical times or today. Expect resistance, disrespect, persecution, and opposition. And yet, everyone come, enter into the blessing of the kingdom of heaven.

Gloria Patri....