

Talking points 1 29 23 Blessed By God

Today's readings provide an amazing breath of material..

Micah 6:8 challenges Israel, and us, to "do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God." (MSG)

Paul declares, staunchly "We preach Christ crucified" in 1st Corinthians 1:23

And of course the Matthew 5:1-12 Jesus introduces the Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes.

Any of these passages highlights a theme of being our best selves as they promote honesty, unity, or oneness, honesty, soundness, and faithful living.

The theme of faithful living highlights the theme of integrity and consistency.

As we have asked of our scriptures in the last few weeks, what consistently should the Christian be doing?

The BEattitudes is a perfect place to conclude our January series on being a “New You in the New Year”.

Persons of faithful living exhibit a constancy of heart, soul, mind and strength. The virtue of ‘being consistent’ connects profession and practice, word and deed, thought and action.

In each of our weeks our scriptures have given us an opportunity to move the words of Christ into our actions.

We have been asked to and have given opportunity to do the following within the sermon and worship time:

- Have a little talk with Jesus about our own lives and answering the questions from our handout that asked us to ask God “How am I doing as a Christian?”

- Had time to connect with opportunities for service during our 2nd Sunday 10 minute ministry meetings
- Participated in our Epiphany “Star Receiving” to give us a focal point for our own individual walk with the Lord in the coming year
- Answer the call to be a committed faithful Presbyterian in the expression of bringing our Per Capita offering to the collection plate.
- And today, being the 5th Sunday we will have an opportunity to ask God about our individual physical health as we pause for our Health Minute for Mission.

Within this series we have discovered something that undergirds all these expressions of faithful living, which I am going to call here ‘faithful stewardship’

I want to broaden our thinking of stewardship to go outside of the box of the tithe or offering.

While that expression of Stewardship is important, it is not the only area that God wants us to steward.

God expects us to be faithful stewards or managers of EVERYTHING He brings into our life.

Time is another thing that God gives to us.

None of us can create a second. None of us can fathom the creation of the universe to understand all the things of God.

However, God asks us to receive the time that God brings to us as something important enough to be a steward or manager of.

Since I cannot 'create time' it must be given to me by God.

And likewise my time on this earth can end when God chooses to.

I am keenly aware as every pastor and preacher is, that the human imagination and focus can only go so far when we are preaching.

My Dad paraphrased the words of Winston Churchill when Daddy used to say that he considered a minister to be a good preacher if the preacher knew how to do three things:

- Be informative,
- Be persuasive, and then
- Be seated

My mentor in the church I was privileged to do my ministry internship in gave me this sage advice when crafting a sermon “the mind can only store what the but can endure”

Most people I have found can only be seated and focused for about 20 minutes that they are needing to sit.

I think about those words from my Dad and my mentor each time I am crafting a sermon.

God bought back both of those men into my remembrance when I began working on this series,

Time is a gift from God.

Time is of the essence.

It's important to do the work of the Lord while we still have time.

No one knows what the future will bring in terms of illness, or challenges and no one truly knows the day or the hour when the Lord will call us home and we will have to account for the relationships, the time, the materials and the circumstances that God gave us.

Integrity and consistency come into play here.

Are we consistently using the time that God has given us.

Balances is what our current culture tries to describe it as.

For Christians integrity is both a gift and a goal. God's justifying grace accepts us "as is". God creates us, Jesus includes us among His people, and the Holy Spirit begins the process of sanctifying, or making us right before God.

And in the middle of all of that God is aware of all that we have upon us and He is present with us.

He knows our sicknesses, our infirmities, our challenges, our wishes and our desires.

Here this morning Jesus stands before us in the scriptures and says these amazing seemingly contradictory terms.

Blessed are those who mourn

Blessed are those who hunger

Blessed are those who thirst

Blessed are those who make peace when others cry for war.

Blessed are those who are persecuted.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely in my account

In the most recognized sermon in the history of the world, Jesus speaks directly to our hurts and our fears.

Who wants to mourn? Mourning means that someone (a loved one) or something (a dream so desperately wanting fulfillment) someone or something important to us has died.

Every fiber in our beings says I want to be blessed without mourning, without poverty of riches or spirit, without war, without violence, without persecution.

Every fiber in our beings says 'bless me with what I want', don't give me the platitudes of the beatitudes.

Every fiber in our beings says I want happiness and protection and God just give it to me.

We beg God.

We call on Jesus.

We study the scriptures in search of the Holy Ghost.

Yet, the scripture that we have found to be most true is that one that proclaims "in every life a little rain must fall".

When we hear of wars and violence we cry out to God.

And Christ says that God hears the cry and cries out with us.

Jesus in his sermon on the mount this morning says quietly, look for the comma. Pay attention to the punctuation.

The sentences read “Blessed are the poor in spirit, [comma]

Blessed are those who mourn, {comma]

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, [comma]

Jesus, whom the wise men journeyed across many miles to see, on our own Epiphany journey says in the time you have on this earth, look for the comma.

Jesus doesn't say life is terrible *period*, life is filled with heartache and struggle and strife *period*.

Jesus says blessed are you because you know me

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

Blessed are the meek because He is our strength, and by His mighty hand we will inherit the earth.

Hear how the Message Version of the Bible puts it:

When Jesus saw the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and when He was seated, His ¹disciples came to Him. ²Then He *began* to teach them, saying,

³“Blessed [spiritually prosperous, happy, to be admired] are the poor in spirit [those devoid of spiritual arrogance, those who regard themselves as insignificant], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [both now and forever].

⁴ “Blessed [forgiven, refreshed by God’s grace] are those who mourn [over their sins and repent], for they will be comforted [when the burden of sin is lifted].

⁵ “Blessed [inwardly peaceful, spiritually secure, worthy of respect] are the [Ⓛ]gentle [the kind-hearted, the sweet-spirited, the self-controlled], for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ “Blessed [joyful, nourished by God’s goodness] are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness [those who actively seek right standing with God], for they will be [completely] satisfied.

⁷ “Blessed [content, sheltered by God’s promises] are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

⁸ “Blessed [anticipating God’s presence, spiritually mature] are the pure in heart [those with integrity, moral courage, and godly character], for they will see God.

⁹ “Blessed [spiritually calm with life-joy in God’s favor] are the makers *and* maintainers of peace, for they will [express His character and] be called the sons of God.

¹⁰ “Blessed [comforted by inner peace and God’s love] are those who are persecuted for [Ⓛ]doing that which is morally right, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven [both now and forever].

¹¹ “Blessed [morally courageous and spiritually alive with life-joy in God’s goodness] are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil things against you because of [your association with] Me. ¹² Be glad and exceedingly joyful, for your reward in heaven is great [absolutely inexhaustible]; for in this same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

In the time we have allotted on this earth, we know The One that is the God of the Impossible.

We know what a friend we have in Jesus, who never leaves us stuck in the middle of the sentence, wondering if the paragraph or this page or chapter of our lives will turn out alright.

Jesus says He's authored the ending, All we must do is look for the comma with the eyes of Christ, knowing that He is the one with us in these and every moments.

Otherwise we could never get to the consistency that He wants us to achieve.

I'm going to close with an example from our ladies group this morning.

The group that was to send their books had unforeseen circumstances and couldn't get their books to them to begin their next Bible study.

First one lady in the group came to me.

We need to be studying the Bible Pastor. Our books have not arrived.

Then more came to me 'we need to be studying the Bible and we have no guides'

Then a few more.

And still more

The group that was to send the books had inserted a period where God had put a comma.

The group said "We are unable to send the books." Period.

The women's group said we cannot abide by that.

In faith they instinctively knew God would not have called them to study the Bible together and surely there must be a comma.

So what did they do?

They got the material ordered by-passing the blockage of the group that should have gotten the books to them months prior.

They looked for the comma, because they knew that God had not inserted a period.

That's how we have to be in our lives.

Time is short.

Time is precious.

God wants us to consistently seek Him in the moments we have.

He wants us to consistently seek Him and not to waver, because if we do we will put a period where God has only placed a comma.

We are blessed by the God of Grace, Love, Mercy, Joy.

We are blessed by the relationship with have when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and confessed Him as our Savior.,

We are blessed when we continue to move consistently in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Christ says we are blessed when we have enough faith to look for the comma, and enough tenacity to hold God to His Word.

Look for the comma.

AMEN.

