

## Blessed Are You

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### Matthew 5:1-12

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4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Epiphany - January 30, 2011

First Congregational Church (UCC) of Colorado Springs  
Shove Memorial Chapel, Colorado College

#### I.

From the point of view of a Coloradan, there are no mountains around the shore of the Sea of Gallilee. There are what we would call grassy and craggy hills. But by using the word “mountain,” in Greek, *oros*, Matthew wants us to think of Moses. Moses was the one who went up Mount Sinai to be in God’s presence and to receive God’s commandments. Now Jesus is the one who hikes up a slope and sits down. His disciples follow and find themselves experiencing God’s presence and receiving a vision of God’s kingdom. How many disciples that followed him there? We don’t know exactly, but by the end of the Sermon on the Mount, a large crowd has gathered. Men and women and children have all made the hike up the slope, drawn by the one who’s vision of God’s kingdom has stirred the deepest longings of their souls.

#### II.

But the words he uses, what possible sense could they make? I mean, we all know how the world works, right? When we use the word “blessed,” most of us are apt to think of success or fortune. How many of us have said, when boasting about a new job or a beautiful home or an exotic vacation or a healthy baby or a hoped for diagnosis or a windfall of money, how many of us have said, “I’m really blessed”?

When you call yourself blessed because you possess one of these fortunes, how often do you pause to think about what you are implying by such a claim?

- Are you meaning to say that God has *rewarded* you with the blessing of a new job? What about the person who didn’t get the position?
- Are you meaning to say that your beautiful home is a sign of God’s favor? What about the working mom waiting for a knock on the door from the bank?

- Are you meaning to say that one of God's top priorities this year is for you to enjoy your stay at an all-inclusive Caribbean resort? What about the kid who serves you drinks, but can't afford to go to school let alone travel?
- Are you meaning to say God only doles out a limited number of healthy babies and you happened to win the divine lottery this year? What about the parents who set their alarm for 3 a.m. every night to give their newborn a shot?
- Are you meaning to say that God approved of your prayer request and waved a wand to make the cancer go away? What about the constant prayers murmured on the other side of the dividing curtain?
- And are you meaning to say that you waited for the money to come in before you called yourself blessed? Is that what you're meaning to say?

O course you're not meaning to say those things. At least, I hope you're not, but it's easy to adopt the value-habits of the culture:

- It's easy to assume that fortune means blessing.
- It's easy to assume that success means blessing.
- It's easy to assume that health means blessing.
- It's easy to assume that wealth means blessing.
- It's easy to assume that your vast social network means blessing.
- It's easy to assume that power means blessing.
- It's easy to assume that prestige means blessing.
- It's easy to assume that what the world sets up on a pedestal is the same thing as God's blessing.

### III.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus releases his hearers from captivity to these assumptions. In his Beatitudes, Jesus climbs the mount to topple fortune, success, health and wealth from their exalted state as the proofs of blessing. He disrupts the value-habits of the world by ignoring blessings as signs of reward and proclaiming blessing upon humans who are in need.

Jesus view was not a popular view then, nor is it a popular view now. Have you noticed that our society does not have much patience for people who are needy?

- To the poor in spirit, those who have had the wind knocked out of them by, poverty, our society says “Get a job. Stop leeching off of others.”
- To those who mourn, those who grieve death and loss, our society says “Get over it and move on. I can’t listen to you anymore.”
- To the meek, those who refuse to assert their superiority over others, our society says “Well, you’ll never get anywhere with that attitude. Oh well, one less person I’ve got to defeat.”
- To those who hunger and thirst for justice, our society says “You’re a dreamer. Hope your pie in the sky tastes good.”
- To those who are merciful, our society says “You’re a tool and a fool. You need get what’s coming to you. Sue! Sue! Sue!
- To the pure in heart, those who want to live simply and to see clearly, our society says “Life is so complicated. Don’t try to figure it out. Just enjoy yourself.”
- To those who are harangued because they want to live with integrity, our society says “You get what you deserve. Go to jail. Go back where you came from. Go to hell.”

To these prevailing attitudes toward human need, Jesus responds with a new vision of the kingdom of heaven, God’s realm which is to come, and which is already, even now, breaking into the world. In the beatitudes, he not only describes this new vision, he *enacts* it. He pronounces blessings upon the needy of the world.

Of course, when we think of “the needy,” we usually think of someone else. To think this way is a great temptation. In Jesus view, to be human is to be needy. We humans are needful of many things - food, shelter, clothing, safety, affection, and purpose - and God’s creation provides the means by which all people’s needs may be fulfilled, but, according to Jesus’ proclamation at the beginning of his Sermon on the Mount, we humans are needful of one thing above all others - God’s blessing.

“Blessed are *you*,” Jesus proclaims, not when everything is going well, but when you are reviled and persecuted and defamed. God’s blessing is not a reward for being better than others. God’s blessing is a response to our neediness. I think that is what Jesus means when he says “Your reward is great in heaven.” I think he is saying that God’s blessing cannot be measured by fortune or success. I think he is saying that God’s blessing

is a response to human need that can only be measured in heaven's terms, in terms of the realm of God, which is to come, and which is already breaking into the world, introducing itself by means of blessing.

#### IV.

Friends, we are a congregation who will, today, vote on whether to launch a Capital Campaign in the amount of 2 million dollars. I do hope that we will vote in favor of this motion. But I also hope that we do not count ourselves as blessed to be able to do so. We are, I believe, *fortunate* to be able to do so, But we are no more blessed by God than the people of the tin and tar paper church with a dirt floor that I visited in Juarez, Mexico. In fact, I pray that we may be more like they, refusing to apply God's blessing or curse to our material position. I pray that we would be able to hear and receive God's blessing, not as a consequence of our relative power and wealth, but as a response to our deep need for God's blessing:

- Jesus speaks God's blessing over you, the poor in spirit, who are seeking the kingdom of heaven. It will be yours!
- Jesus speaks God's blessing over you, who mourn. God provides comfort.
- Jesus speaks God's blessing over you, the meek. You will inherit the earth.
- Jesus speaks God's blessing over you, who hunger and thirst for justice. You will be satisfied.
- Jesus speaks God's blessing over you, the compassionate. Compassion will be yours.
- Jesus speaks God's blessing over you, the pure in heart. You will see God!
- Jesus speaks God's blessing over you, the peacemakers. You'll be known as God's children.
- Jesus speaks God's blessing over you, who are harassed. Heaven's breaking in even now.
- And blessed are you, church, not because you're better or more fortunate than anyone else.

You're blessed because you see that you are in need of blessing, the blessing of God that Jesus offers you even now. Right now. Amen.