

## *I Bless*

The First Congregational Church, Branford  
February 2, 2020; Matthew 5:1-12  
Rev. Suzanne Personette

The sermon on the mount, as it's been called, takes place near the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He *begins* with the beatitudes. Beatitude means *supreme blessedness*! Supreme blessedness! Jesus began his ministry by saying, you matter. God cares about you. Jesus sat down when he gave the blessings - a revered *Jewish teacher* sits when they're teaching.

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

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

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

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The blessings of God for the people of God.

There's speculation as to who these beatitudes were spoken. Some say because Jesus sat down, that this opening message was for the disciples. But, in these early days of his ministry, there were only like 3-4 disciples, but there were others who had begun to follow him. He seems to be addressing this inner circle. Maybe as a way to say, you here need to get this, because you're tasked with going out to give the blessing of God. Fill up on these blessings, then go forth to bless. You can give what you haven't been given. So, fill up!

They needed to give a word of hope to the people. Remember, they were all oppressed by Rome, as well as by the political and religious establishment who

were in bed with Rome. Jesus wants this inner circle to give voice to those with little to no power. Have you ever felt powerless? Has someone ever come along and said, *I see you, I got you, you are blessed, and God is going to make right on this sometime, somewhere. And, if you die without the reward, you'll receive it in heaven. But, I see you, I see what you're struggling through, and you matter to me, and you matter to God. God's got you through whatever you're going through.*

After the beatitudes were given, perhaps it was at that point that Jesus stood and addressed the crowd below with the rest of the sermon - which covers 23 topics! Now, that's a long sermon!

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus gave both blessings *and* woes - the woes amount to: woe to you who have everything if you forget about those who don't. Woe to you who have everything if you forget about those who don't. Luke placed Jesus on a level plain for these communications.

But, Matthew repeatedly draws parallels between Jesus and Moses in his gospel. In the bible, when we hear, *went up the mountain*, it's almost exclusively associated with Moses and Jesus. The mountain is meant to be a site for revelation and instructions in God's will. Here we see Jesus giving an authoritative teaching on the mount in much the same way Moses related the 10 Commandments that were given to him on Mt. Sinai.

Again, in terms of who the Sermon on the Mount was given, the thought that's most accepted is that Matthew wrote his gospel for the readers. *We* are the hearers of Jesus' sermon. We are the receivers of his blessings. And, the message *then* and the message *now* is:

Go forth and bless, Go forth and bless, Go forth and bless.

You know how people say there's too much booing in churches and not enough cheering? You **know** we cheer here! Three blessed cheers for those who came to church! Cheer out, blessed, blessed, blessed!.... Yes. And, see, now you get to go out there and say to people, blessed, blessed, blessed! And, maybe they won't put you away, lol!

Okay, listen to this, and then I'll invite you to do some blessing, so be thinking about who and what *you* bless:

I bless stressed out parents, I bless those who work many hours, I bless those who worry about money, children and teens, I bless those who adopt, foster, mentor, teach or coach, I bless those who have marriage troubles, job troubles, I bless those who are staring surgery in the face, I bless those who are so down on themselves that it causes them to do just about anything, even want to die, I bless those who are trying to hold it all together, I bless those who live in fear, I bless those who hide their gifts under a bushel because they don't want to fail, I bless those who watch a family member die, I bless caretakers, volunteers and home

health aides, drivers, nurse practitioners, doctors and chaplains, I bless those who are filled with resentment and withhold forgiveness, I bless those who have people mad at them, I bless those who have a body that doesn't do what they want it to do...

Here are a couple of beatitudes given to our faith community:

I bless our new Christian Education Coordinator, Kerry Stewart.

I bless the Pastoral Search Committee. A reminder, beloved, that the church profile was completed at the end of October, and the actual search only began 3 months ago. The PSC is working extremely hard. It takes time. The way a search works is sometimes a committee might feel they get close to a final candidate, and then something happens and things fall apart. That's all normal, in fits and starts. I promise you, *it's going to happen*. Hang in there for your new *settled* senior minister. Trust *divine timing*. You are blessed, congregation, as you wait. I bless the settled senior minister, whoever and wherever they are.

Okay, blessed of God, want to try your hand - you can stand or remain seated and say, *I bless....* [many blessings spoken]

I bless kindness.

I bless Jesus who comes to bless us so, who we get to be here today because of, the one who lays in a manger, who heals the broken, who weeps with those who mourn, who prays through a dark night, who dies in agony, and who resurrects and lives again.

Now some last words by Maren Tirabassi, a retired pastor and author:

I bless the emptiness in our hearts -

because that leaves a space for God to enter in.

I bless the things in us that touch other people gently -

because gentleness is the way to reach another.

I bless the sadness that sometimes overwhelms us -

because that will lead others to comfort us.

I bless the mercy and forgiveness that we show others -

because it reflects God's mercy and forgiveness that is extended to us every single day.

I bless you when you are a peacemaker -

and grant you God's peace which passes all understanding...

I bless. Amen.