

“Reshaping the World”
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Sunday, February 2, 2020

Micah 6, Psalm 15, Matthew 5

The prophet Micah stands in the countryside of Judah, a ring of mountains as his backdrop, with words that cut to the chase from a God that was tired of ridiculous over the top overtures of sacrificial animals and oil when all God wanted was a little more one on one time. Micah asks, “Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand of rivers of oil?” As a people of faith way back then, seems like they got into the habit of, well if I can’t make it to the temple this week, I’ll just add an extra turtledove to the sacrifice next time to make up for it. When really, all God wanted was to have a closer walk with you, some one on one time.

Eight hundred years later, Jesus stands in a similar land, looking at the people gathered on the hill. And he scans the faces and the hearts of the people. Guessing from the words he gives to his disciples in the Beatitudes, he sees illness, poverty, abuse, despair, hopelessness, a hunger for justice and peace. And taking his disciples a little further up the hill, he turns to them and says, blessed are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers.

There is a sense in the beatitudes, that Jesus has hand-picked those moments in our lives when we are most out of control. When we have lost something. When we have failed at something. When we don’t feel successful. When we’re struggling. And Jesus blesses our worst moments. When we’re grieving. When we’re frustrated. When we keep trying to change the system and nothing’s changing – like homelessness, like war.

To our culture, the words of the Beatitudes don’t sound quite right. Shouldn’t it read something like: “Blessed are those who are successful. Blessed are those who are happily married. Blessed are those who got A’s in school.” And so on. But it would seem that Jesus is blessing those who have none of these things. Jesus is blessing those who do not appear to be ‘winners’ in the eyes of the world. The quiet. The pure. The activists. Look at how Greta Thunberg was ridiculed by world leader Donald Trump.

The Beatitudes are given as a way to live into, a way to be part of the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God in our midst. In the Beatitudes, Jesus lifts up the least and the forgotten. In the blessings he gives to the people on the hill, he tells them, ‘You are a blessing. Even if the world doesn’t see you, I see you.’ He sees the people whom the world does not see, because the world is too busy, too addicted to worldly ways of power and domination.

Henri Nouwen wrote, “Compassion grows with the inner recognition that your neighbour shares your humanity with you. This partnership cuts through all walls which might have kept you separate. Across all barriers of land and language, wealth and poverty, knowledge and ignorance, we are one, created from the same dust, subject to the same laws, destined for the

same end.”¹ But that’s a hard pill to swallow, given our tendencies. In 1807, William Wordsworth penned the poem, ‘The World is Too Much with Us’:

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!

...

For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.

What I take from this timeless verse is how it applies so easily to my life – where distractions upon distractions fill my mind, my heart, and my calendar – and it is easy to lose sight of the one thing that should be my focus – God – God in my world, God in my life, God in the very center of my heart.

Coming back this week from 4 days of silent retreat at the Loyola House in Guelph, I can tell you just how hard it is to peel back layer after layer of busyness, of noise in my life, until I even start to get close to that inner center where the presence of God thrives, lives and loves, regardless of my neglect and distractions.

Wordsworth cries out We have given our hearts away. Yes, we have. We have given our hearts away to passions and addictions that the world feeds with a frenzy – through advertising, the media, work environment, and social pressures. All of which blinds us from seeing God’s presence that surrounds us, high and low, near and far, if we had spiritual eyes to see.

Jesus tells us that the Kingdom of God is here, but here where? Why does the reality of the world overwhelm our ability to see the light of God’s kingdom in our midst? The Psalm writers clearly saw how easily the world is swayed by ideas and passions that lead to paths of destruction. Psalm 58:

Do the leaders of the nations know what is right? Or are their hearts set on power and fame? Do they look within for guidance to the Heart of all hearts? In whom can the people put their trust? The ignorant go astray, following idol gods of illusion; they err in their blindness fooling only themselves. And then, the psalm writer sees clearly how the world could be if each person could see through God’s eyes: “Awaken us to the interconnectedness of all beings, to all that fly and swim, to all that walk and crawl upon the earth! Those who know Love will rejoice as the nations learn to cooperate, as the peoples of earth recover their true heritage. People will say, “The time has come to dwell in peace and integrity; to walk together in the Light of the Most High, Heart of the Universe!”

Jesus stood on a hill and looked down on the people gathered to hear him. And as he looked upon them, he could see into their hearts. And he could see the hurt and the pain and the struggling and the suffering in their hearts. And his words that have become known as the Beatitudes, witness to what God’s love might accomplish if we let it loose in the world.

¹ Feasting on the Word, 312.

And it couldn't be any easier.

As the prophet Micah spoke so many years ago,

all we need to do is to seek justice,

love kindness,

and walk humbly with our God.

And the Kingdom of God will be in front of your eyes,

placed in the palm of your hands,

and the world will be blessed.

Thanks be to God. Amen.