

**February 2, 2020**

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.  
Amen

The Sermon on the Mount. What a sermon – certainly one of Jesus' best, at least of those recorded in our gospels.

I think it is easy for many people today who call themselves Christians to look at the Beatitudes, as this section of Matthew's Gospel is known, and pick and choose where they side. That is, do they see themselves in the first part of each Beatitude, or the second half?

Are we poor in spirit, if so is ours the kingdom of heaven? Are we those who mourn? Sometimes, surely. Are we meek? Probably as meek as we can be. Do we hunger and thirst for righteousness? Are we merciful? Are we pure in heart? Are we peacemakers? Are we persecuted for righteousness' sake? Are we reviled?

While we may struggle with those questions, we certainly would like to revel in the outcome wouldn't we? I mean who wouldn't want to be comforted, or receive mercy, or see God? It is also very easy to look at this sermon in its historical setting and only concentrate on the people who heard Jesus' sermon and the social and political situation in which people found themselves living daily.

It is much more difficult to study this sermon as if it were preached just for our ears.

I began this sermon on January 21<sup>st</sup> – the day after Martin Luther King Day. I read the gospel text, the Sermon on the Mount, and was struck by how relevant it is not only today, but every age: past, present and future.

Allow me to rewrite this sermon of Jesus. Allow me to slightly rewrite it as if Dr. King might have preached it at the march in Washington D.C. that is burned into our national psyche. It might have sounded something like this:

"When Martin saw the crowds, he told them he had been to the mountaintop, and as the crowd hushed, he spoke to them saying:

Blessed are all who are poor, blacks and whites alike, for yours is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn over injustices practiced each day against all black children and adults and other oppressed minorities, for you will be comforted.

Blessed are all of every color and creed who are meek, for you will inherit the earth.

Blessed are all people everywhere who hunger and thirst for righteousness, because they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, no matter your religion or creed, for you will receive God's mercy.

Blessed are all people of every color and nationality who are pure in heart, for you most certainly will see God.

Blessed are all people everywhere around the world who are peacemakers, for you will certainly be called the chosen children of God.

Blessed are all blacks of times past and those here today and all people who are persecuted by oppressors for righteousness' sake, for your kingdom is the kingdom of heaven.

And blessed are all blacks, all minorities, all who are victims when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on God's account. Don't be disheartened. Rejoice and be glad, because dear brothers and sisters, your reward is great in heaven. You are not the first to be persecuted in this way."

I can't help but think that Dr. King may have memorized the Sermon on the Mount and referenced it daily in one way or another.

My sole point in this exercise is to say that this bit of Matthew's gospel should be studied with regularity. It is as relevant today as it was when first preached. It simply can't go out of style for Christians. And it deserves to be taken seriously in every age, for the truths within it are indeed timeless.

It may have been the biblical source Dr. King had in mind when he clearly spoke his famous "I Have a Dream" speech in D.C.

And today, so many years later, (?) what comes to our minds, regarding our culture and society when we read and hear this text today? Again, where do we see ourselves? Where do we see others?

Do we immediately think something like this: Blessed are the unemployed, blessed are the unimpressive, blessed are the underrepresented?

It may actually be difficult for us to use this text as a catalyst to study what is really going on around us in very real ways and in real time.

Each petition, each verse, in the Beatitudes is not passive, there is some action required. Being a follower of Jesus is not the same as being a couch potato or a Monday morning quarterback. Following means to be active, alive, involved for the sake of Jesus in whatever ways we may serve him.

Listen again to the prophetic words of Micah: Micah 6:3 – O my people, what have I done to you? In what way have I wearied you? Answer me!

Micah is reminding his hearers exactly what God has done for them: He brought them up from the land of Egypt. He redeemed them from the house of slavery. He sent such folks to them as: Moses, Aaron and Miriam.

And yet God's followers then, as well as all of us today, can become very weary, can't we?

And no wonder. We look around and we see so much that is not right, so much that needs attention, so many people who are affected by the ills of society, which are almost too numerous to count.

So perhaps it is indeed right that people like Dr. King come into our lives at a time when we need to hear their voices that speak to our world and remind us that God's word to us is relevant each day of our lives.

We are reminded that God doesn't give up on us, even as we are wearied all too quickly. God sends all sorts of folks to retell his message of love and salvation, whether or not we acknowledge that fact, especially when the words spoken can divide us as well as unite us.

So, if you thought as you heard the gospel read today – this is lovely. How much those who heard it then must have appreciated Jesus speaking to all of those who were oppressed and who had lost all hope for the present and the future. If you thought that, you were right, but there is so much more to this sermon than being a topic for that moment only. Surely those who first heard it might have been strengthened in heart, given hope and better understood the kingdom of heaven and the God that Jesus talked about.

But there is so much more for us to digest as we take this sermon as a personal word to us from God through his only Son, who is carrying out his mission and attracting more and more folks who want to know more about God's kingdom.

Blessed are we who recognize God's word to us, for we will in turn bless others with God's peace and love. We will in turn spread Jesus' words of hope and salvation to each and every corner of the earth.

Thanks be to God. Amen