

“Be—Attitudes”

Message by DD Adams

Providence United Methodist Church

4th SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

February 2, 2014

The gospel lesson for today is taken from the book of Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1 through 12. I'll be reading from the New Revised Standard Version. 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.” This is God’s word for God’s people. Thanks be to God. Let’s pray. Holy and blessed God, hear our prayer today. Grant us comfort, provision, mercy, and a pure heart. Bless us with peace and patience, goodness and joy, as we look to our reward which is you dear Lord. Grant ears to hear, hearts that perceive what you say, minds that remember, and the power of your Holy Spirit to seek all you’ve given us as God’s children. And for today Lord, bless us in our sadness and grief. In Christ’s name we pray. Amen.

Great crowds were following Jesus from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan. Jesus may have climbed the mountain to escape the crowds. Scripture doesn't say. Maybe they followed him. Could be he chose one of the hills by the Sea of Galilee. That's where the slopes were concave. When the water splashed against the slope it made a perfect sounding board with great acoustics.

Scripture says Jesus sat down and his disciples gathered around him. The blessings spoken were the beginning portion of the Sermon on the Mount. With each beatitude Jesus spoke a blessing was pronounced on those who obeyed. They were high standards. He was telling the disciples who they needed to become. As I read them, I felt this sense of failure because I knew I couldn't achieve what they asked. And then with that feeling, the blessing it promised me became totally elusive. I didn't understand it—especially verse 4.

It reads, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted”; it means that to be blessed promises we'll be made happy by God. It's a word of encouragement and comfort that *one day* we'll find hope in our sorrow. What about today? Could there be a blessing in the present? I need to be blessed today. I'm sure that God cares for those who mourn, but I wonder if mourning produces a blessing now? The word *mourn* that's used is the strongest word in the Greek for mourning. It means mourning for the dead or mourning for someone we loved. It makes our heart ache and our eyes tear up. Many here today have had loved ones die. The grief we feel screams inside of us to feel its depth. We feel deep sorrow mixed with anger and we feel helpless and powerless. We've heard of many shootings across the country. With all this, we can't find a solution or a way to make the pain go away.

The first time I experienced deep mourning was last April when my mom died. The mourning just continues. Last Sunday one of my best friends Jonmin came to our service. Her husband just died. I've given many funerals at Providence that bring tears to my eyes. The scripture says "Blessed are those who mourn . . ."

I think to myself, how can that be? Children die almost daily in Afghanistan from street bombs. A child dies every 45 seconds from a deadly mosquito bite in Africa. Parents grieve from the news of their child being shot at school. We think, "Blessed are those who mourn" ?. I feel no happiness from my broken heart. Some scholars have said "those who mourn" mean, "Blessed are those who are desperately sorry for the sorrow and the suffering of this world." If someone is truly cultivating meaningful relationships and praying for others in this world they will be deeply connected to the sorrows of others.

Yet what has grieved me most throughout my life with Christ is a deep sorrow for my own sin. Some here at Providence have said I don't love myself. Yet what I find is a complete acceptance of who I am from Christ. This feeling takes me to the cross. The cross opens my eyes to the horror of my sin. It makes me realize that my sin has created destruction and damage in other people's lives. Do we recognize our interconnectedness in the human race? When we sin, it affects many around us.

So now maybe the be—attitude becomes an attitude—an attitude of intense appreciation for what Christ has done. Those who mourn will be comforted and that's what we call being penitent. Because of the work of Christ we find joy. We're forgiven, but what about the grief and sadness that isn't being healed? Will the grief be washed over by a blessing that brings hope for the future?

When a loved one dies life is never the same. Our hope for the person and for the relationship comes to an end. When a parent loses a child something large

within the parent dies and grieves forever. When we hear of school shootings and deaths in Afghanistan could it be there's a blessing? For example, maybe the absence of someone changes the makeup of our heart in some way. Maybe the compassion we feel for others increases. Maybe we see life differently and value our relationships more. The dark places we walk through in life change us. In our loss, we forgive the annoyances and now see them as valued memories. We remember the stain covered shirts we use to think were so untidy and now remember them with fondness. We remember the lectures and now see it as care that was given. If we had them here now we would appreciate them more.

Jesus climbed a mountain, and his disciples came to him. He sat down as a Rabbi prepared to teach and said "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." Jesus felt grief and sorrow deeply. He felt inside his heart the mourning of those he spoke to that day. Today, Jesus feels your pain and loss. He yearns to comfort you and surround you as he blesses you. Come forward today to pray, to replace some of those feelings of loss with the blessing of God. Let's pray. God of mercies and God of all comforts, wrap your arms around your people today as they seek blessing from your hand. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.