

The Beatitudes are some of the most familiar verses of the Bible

– and perhaps for that reason, among the most difficult to hear with fresh ears.

We are accustomed to hearing them as a prescription for the Christian life and demeanor, like another table of the law.

And then we turn them into good works that demonstrate our worthiness as Christians.

Christians are to be “nice” – meek, sweet, gentle, and the like.

Well, as one of my seminary professors used to say, “Bullsgeschichte”.

For when we take that interpretation to its conclusion, we discover we cannot possibly measure up.

We are all found to be on the “unblessed” or cursed side of the ledger.

Seen in this way,

the Beatitudes always drive us to our knees and to the cross.

Certainly not a bad place for sinners to be.

...

But I think Jesus had more in mind when he spoke these words.

For the multitudes of people who went up the mountain with Jesus,

these were not familiar, sentimental words,

these were new words.

Words spoken to them by a teacher who, like Moses, went up the mountain to speak the word of the Lord.

Words spoken by the One

whose very presence with them

brought the authority and will of Almighty God

into that very moment and space.

Jesus brings the kingdom of heaven near.

...

So on that mountain, Jesus speaks a fresh word to the crowds:

Blessed A word that invokes the favorable action of God upon someone.

It is not a description of the person,

but of the God who alone blesses.

For Jesus to call someone blessed is to declare that person to be in a different state than that person was before.

The crowds came to Jesus without blessing – and he blessed them.

...

New Testament Scholar Mark Alan Powell,

exploring the language of the Beatitudes in light of the whole narrative of God's people,

suggests reading them as defining the people of God:

Blessed are those who are poor in spirit --

- A people Who are dispossessed and abandoned,
- Who have no cause for hope,
- for God's realm will happen to them
- – God's loving desire for them will come about.

Blessed are those who mourn

Who grieve a loss, who lack joy
– for comfort will come to them.

Blessed are the meek

- Those who are humiliated,
- trampled upon,
- used,
- taken for granted
- who have been denied access to land and the resources of the earth

For the earth is their inheritance.

Blessed are those who have been denied justice,
for God will make things right.

These first four Beatitudes show the desperate need of God's people

and the promise that God will reverse their circumstances to restore hope, joy, land, and justice.

The last four are about those whose actions fulfill the promises made in the first 4.

- Those who show mercy and healing to the hopeless will themselves receive mercy.
- Those who radiate God's love and bring joy to those grieving

will see God.

- Those who seek to remove the shame and humiliation of God's people through peacemaking,
 - will be called heirs of God's riches.
- To Those who endure attack while working for justice for God's people
 - the loving will of God will come.

The Beatitudes, then, invoke a dynamic relationship between God and the people – **through us who follow Jesus.**

**It is not that we do these things in order to get the reward,
but that the reward comes in the doing of them.**

***As we follow Jesus, loving God and loving our neighbors, we discover the blessing of God in our lives.

...

Blessed. . . Jesus says.

To be blessed by Jesus is to trust God even in the worst of circumstances, knowing that God always acts to make things right.

Jesus – Immanuel – God with us – embodies that divine action in our world.

And those who follow him do what he does.

...

Jesus is very clear – to follow him is not an easy life.

It is not a wide road paved in gold.

Jesus' followers will be attacked for being the presence of God in the world.

They will be ridiculed and lied about
and shunned for showing mercy,
making peace,
and working for justice.

It is not a matter of if, **but when**, as Jesus himself demonstrated.

But even suffering is the occasion for God's blessing
– for God to act with saving love.

This too, Jesus demonstrated

when he left his tomb empty
and showed himself **victorious**

over all that causes hopelessness,

- grief,
- humiliation,
- injustice,
- persecution and suffering
- – even death itself.

We have reason to follow Jesus – assuming all the risks it entails –
because we know that nothing can stand in the way

**of God's kingdom coming and his will being done
on earth as in heaven.**

Nothing.

Jesus who blesses is risen from the dead!

...

A little less than three weeks ago, I visited the Tent of Nations,
an organic farm in Palestine, on the West Bank
and talked with David Nassar,

whose family has been farming the land for over 100 years.

They are followers of Jesus.

The Tent of Nations is a project that
builds bridges between people,
and between people and the land,
by bringing different cultures together
to develop understanding and promote respect for each other and
the environment.

The project runs educational programs at Daher's Vineyard,

the organic farm, located in the hills southwest of Bethlehem,
Palestine.

**The Tent of Nations is a peacemaking action – as well as seeking
justice in a difficult situation.**

Here is David's Story:

The land known as Daher's Vineyard was purchased in 1916 by Daher
Nassar, the father of Bishara, and grandfather of David Nassar whose
family now farms the land.

In those 100 years, many family members have worked the land by day,
and slept in caves by night.

The land produces olives, grapes, almonds, wheat and other crops.

In 1991, the Israeli government declared the surrounding area including the Nassars' property as Israeli 'state land' for the Gush Etzion settlement bloc.

The Nassar family has all the original land registration papers and has cultivated the land throughout the

- Ottoman,
- British,
- Jordanian,
- and Israeli governance;
- clearly demonstrating that the Israeli government has no right to declare it theirs.

The family challenged Israel's declaration and the case was brought to court.

In 2001, though the land case was still unresolved, the local council of Israeli settlements decided to build a road through the east side of the Nassar land.

This was challenged, and the building stopped.

But once again in 2002, the same council decided to build a road all the way through the Nassar land, this time through the west side.

The Nassars stopped both road projects through the intervention of the Israeli courts.

In 2005 the case of the land ownership was debated in the high court and, after many postponements,

the Nassar family was told that they could begin the process of registering their land with the Israeli authorities,

something most Palestinians are not permitted to do. The process is still working its way through the authorities.

For over 20 years now, the family is still struggling to hold on to the land.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, dispossessed and abandoned

– those whose situation seems hopeless.

The kingdom of heaven will come to them.

For David Nassar and his family, the kingdom comes through

- The justice of the court,
- the support of donations to the tent of Nations project
the volunteers who participate in the farming project,
- as well as the prayers of many around the world.

...

Here in York PA,

we do not face the threat of our land and homes being taken away unjustly

- but we do face circumstances that are overwhelming,
- That cause us grief,
- and leave us yearning for things in our world to be put right as God intends.

Jesus says– Blessed are they.

And here in York PA, we have opportunities to be someone else's

- hope, comfort,
- mercy, and advocate.

Jesus says – Blessed are they.

And yes – as we follow our dear Lord to the cross, we endure suffering for his name.

Jesus says -- Blessed are you.

Where Jesus is,

God is present.

What Jesus says, is true.

Those who follow him are truly blessed.

In the Name. . . .