

## Listening from the Other Direction

Epiphany 4 2023

Matthew 5:1-12; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; Psalm 15; Micah 6:1-8

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About 8 years ago, St. Andrew's got a phone call and the voice on the other end said, "Will you help me? I've called all the other churches and no one will help." The person on the other end of the phone suffered with severe anxiety and a borderline personality disorder and was looking for someone to talk to about God. Our parish supported this person with grocery cards, and later food from the Farm Garden, with prayer, with weekly visits and conversation, helped her meet rent some months, supported her through multiple crises and midnight rides to the hospital. Lynn Fairey, to whom I am so grateful, also spent hours with her in hospital waiting rooms or ~~on~~ talking on the phone while I as I was on holiday. We just helped her move to Alberta to be closer to family and as I have been thinking over the near decade of ministry with her, I have been remembering the moments of absolute clarity and freedom she would have. They usually came when she spoke about God or when she gave with great generosity to others in need from the little she had. It was in witnessing those moments of clarity and freedom that the Beatitudes of Jesus started to make more sense to me. It's in witnessing these kinds moments of clarity in each of our lives that the wisdom of the Beatitudes can start to call us deeper into God's Kingdom. Like that moment after a long journey with grief, when you one day notice there is space, that first time when the story of your loss is not the very first thing that meets you. It's there but it's not the first thing, even for a moment, and a healing, an integration, a freedom is starting to happen. Those spaces start to become more and more frequent and longer and slowly, slowly, your life now grows around your loss and embraces it rather than your loss encompassing everything. It's those kinds of moments, that kind of deep and holy work. Those who mourn will be comforted.

So often, when we hear the Beatitudes we focus just on the first part of each sentence: on the poor in spirit, the mourners, the humble, righteousness seeker, the peacemaker, those who are persecuted. And sometimes, especially when we interact with Luke's version that talks about the poor rather than the poor in spirit as Mathew does, we can get caught up in a strange glorification of those who suffer. So it's helpful, I think, to listen from the other direction. Listen to these:

Theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

They shall be comforted.

They shall be filled.

They shall receive mercy.

They shall see God.

They shall be called Children of God.

This is the kind of freedom, of life, of salvation, of new creation that God is working among us. And this is the very first thing of any length that Jesus says in Matthew's Gospel. This is his very first teaching, the foundational beginning to his Sermon on the Mount and everything that will

come after. Matthew wants us to make the connection between Moses, who went up a mountain to receive the Law given by God, and Jesus through whom not just the Law but the Kingdom of God is being revealed. Just a chapter before the Beatitudes, Matthew told of Satan taking Jesus “up a very high mountain” and tempting Him with all the kingdoms of the world if Jesus would worship him (4:8). And so here on this mountain is the beautiful revealing of the Kingdom Jesus both is and chooses, God’s Kingdom. Start here, says Jesus, start here if you want to know God and are longing for God’s Kingdom, start here and listen in the other direction. If you want to know of God’s love, listen in the other direction.

Listen in the other direction from all the predominant cultural narratives, all that you think is wise and powerful and successful. As St. Paul puts it in our second reading, this isn’t the philosophical wisdom the Greeks longed for, Jesus’ crucifixion wasn’t the longed-for sign of great power predominant in Jewish Messianic hope. And it’s not what our Western culture holds up for us as esteemed and valued either. *It’s love.* God chose to speak and live in the other direction: to come here to us, to whole-heartedly give God’s self to us, to choose death, chose the farthest, thing from power, in order to know us and love us and transform all that keeps us from God, including death itself, into a path to life for us. This isn’t <sup>the</sup> wisdom the Greeks longed for, the great military power hoped for in the Messiah and it’s not what we know to be honourable, or safe or successful. *It’s love.*

The poor in spirit, the mourners, the humble, righteousness seekers, the peacemakers, those who are persecuted. In Greek, the Beatitudes are in the indicative mode, not the imperative, and this means Jesus is not telling the crowd to become these but rather he’s telling them about the reality of what is. God has set about making the world free and these people know that reality, that freedom, that life, with particular clarity be it just for a moment or a lifetime. The scholar Rowan Williams describes these people as “the people who have got in touch with what eternally matters, with God’s reality. These are the free people, because they have been liberated from all the fictions, great and small, that keep us locked into our anxieties and ambitions.”<sup>1</sup> What is most key is that when we have glimpsed God’s freedom at work in our lives we are called to then live from it. For the nature of God’s freedom, as Rowan goes on is “always a freedom that *makes other people free* and gives them joy in the reality, the truth, that is God’s life.”<sup>2</sup>

So spend some time with week with a Beatitude moment in your life: remember the healing that came or is still coming, think on the freedom that came or is still coming, think on the new life and on the love and live from that place. For this is what God requires of us. Thanks be to God.

**Amen.**

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<sup>1</sup> Williams Rowan. “What it means to be free” The King’s School, Canterbury. 2012 (my italics) <http://rowanwilliams.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/2367/archbishop-on-bonhoeffer-what-it-means-to-be-free>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.