

Sermon Title: A Beatific Life
Text: Matthew 5:1-12
By: Rev. Terry Carty
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Place: Kingston Springs United Methodist Church
Season: Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Main Point: contemplate these understandings of blessings and consider how our lives will be fulfilled if we live into God's kingdom.

If I seem holier today, it is probably because I have spent so much time this week contemplating The Beatitudes. (laugh it off)

Seriously though, a few years ago two friends of mine who are active United Methodists and are highly respected management consultants participated in an in-depth study of the Beatitudes. They learned that the Beatitudes are considered by some the "10 Commandments" of the New Testament.

Think about it: In the Old Testament Moses went up on a mountain to receive instructions for God's way of living. That journey resulted in the 10 Commandments that have been the law of the Hebrews since that day.

In the New Testament Jesus went up on a mountain to deliver a new way of understanding God's way of living. These 8 Beatitudes are the key to understanding all the teachings of Christ – at least for Matthew and Luke.

As they studied the Beatitudes, they realized that these beautiful blessings, while difficult to get our minds around, lay out the Christian life. Consider this morning's message a 'taste test' of the depth of meaning these statements of Blessing could have on our lives.

First, a blessing is a good thing, right? When our children say something cute and insightful, we kiss them on the forehead or cheek and laud their naïve wisdom. We give them a blessing and often they respond with other gems of childhood sayings. My little ones are now young adults. But Anne and I still give them blessings when we see them acting according to the values that we worked so hard to try to instill in them. Now I understand what a blessing it was when my grandmother would just grin sometimes and say emphatically, "I LOVE YOU!"

In the Beatitudes, the word translated most often as "blessing" is not a word of feeling, but a word that declares what God thinks of them. People with beatific qualities gain God's approval. Because God thinks well of them, they are "blessed." God's blessing is infinitely more important than just feeling good about one's self. It is the thing that keeps us moving forward toward becoming more like the image of God.

Second, what the heck does “poor in spirit” mean? And what about this “mourning”? Keep in mind that we are reading a translation of something that was written in another language and copied repeatedly before it finally got into English. Most scholars think that Matthew was written in Koine Greek, but there are some who think that it was written originally in Aramaic – the language that Jesus spoke. If that is the case it was then translated into Greek as the church spread. And it was interpreted for almost a century and a half before King James authorized the English translation to be circulated in 1611.

Language has changed many times. Culture has changed many times. The meaning of these beatific virtues has not changed. They provide a greater understanding of what pleases God.

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew 5 while I give you a quick guide to the attributes:

- *Poor in spirit* — humility
- *Those who mourn* — the repentant; when we become humble we feel sorry and sometimes guilty for our pridefulness
- *The meek* — not being a push-over but having controlled strength
- *Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness* — those who yearn for (and work for) truth and righteousness (inwardly and outwardly)
- *Merciful* (no interpretation needed)
- *Pure in heart* — those who have real intentions to lead a holy life (as defined by John Wesley's Christian perfection)
- *Peacemakers* (no interpretation needed)
- *Persecuted for righteousness* (no interpretation needed)

My management consultant friends began to take the Beatitudes seriously as an interpretation of **the** way of Christian living. Then as they continued to teach management techniques with major corporations and national defense contractors, they began to realize that the Beatitudes also define the character of a successful manager of people. They began to reference Matthew 5:3-12 as they taught. They also began to offer their management training, free of charge, to religious organizations.

My friends, one an industrial engineer by trade, the other an attorney, began to internalize the Beatitudes and the beatific attributes began to be always in the forefront of their minds. Transformation was happening in their way of living.

The engineer entered seminary to learn all he can about the Christian life – this way of living. The attorney continues to live an almost cloistered life when he is outside of his work. He is constantly reading and meditating on the finer points of the Christian life.

Today I call us all to take seriously this life God has given us. I call us to consider the blessings that God grants as we begin to recognize God's kingdom around us. I call us to contemplate the beatific understandings of blessings and consider how our lives will be fulfilled if we live into God's kingdom. Amen.