

The Path to Holiness

Fourth Week of Ordinary Time – January 29, 2017 – Matthew 5: 1-12a

“When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he had sat down, his disciples came to him. He began to teach them...” The opening of this gospel paints a very interesting scenario. This is not Jesus speaking to or teaching the vast crowds gathered. Rather, Jesus has taken up a position upon the mountain above the crowd. The teaching Jesus puts forth is the path to holiness.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” What might those first disciples have thought with this opening line? The poor, the down-trodden, those lacking in purpose or position are part of the kingdom of heaven? How is that so? Isn't it the rich, the powerful, the religious elite and the strong that rule?

The foundation of Jesus' instruction is that holiness resides in the very essence of the human condition. “Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.” The sting of grief is a universal human experience. No one escapes the reality of death, the reality of loss. The wealthy and the poor alike will mourn. Jesus is saying that it is in our loss that we have the ability to rely on God.

Jesus has taken the qualities of human life that make up a necessary dependence on God and elevated those qualities to the status of being the necessary path to be one of his disciples. He is sitting on the mountain above the crowds pointing out to his disciples that it is in our brokenness that God dwells. It is in our pursuit of what is right that we find the living and redeeming God.

Jesus is saying to the disciples and to us today...Look, God is in the midst of the grieving, the meek, the hungry, the merciful, the clean of heart and the peacemakers. These are the qualifications to holiness. These are the qualifications to be one of his disciples. What constitutes the pathway to heaven is not financial, political or personal power. The pathway to heaven lies in the vulnerable state of the human condition. When we are vulnerable, broken and without, we then have the ability to be open to God, open to be holy as God is holy.

The gospel ends with a reference to persecution. Those who work for righteousness within the world and who take up a witness to Christ will suffer some form of persecution along the way. The coming persecution and the brokenness of the human condition is what Jesus puts forward this week as the way to holiness and discipleship. Jesus affirms that we are to “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.”

Blessings!


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