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**October 28, 2018**

**The Beatitudes – “Blessed Are Those Who Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness”**

### **Introduction to Worship**

This morning we continue our worship series on the Beatitudes, where Jesus paints a picture of the Kingdom of God, what our lives and our world could look like if we all tuned our hearts with God’s heart, and let our lives follow. Over the past three weeks, we’ve wrestled with the blessings Jesus speaks of for those who are “poor in spirit” “merciful,” and “meek.” We’ve looked at our own spiritual poverty and our dependence on God, our call to mercifully alleviate the suffering of others, and the righteous anger and self-control of biblical meekness. This morning, we turn to the fourth Beatitude, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” As we allow this word **RIGHTEOUSNESS** to roll around in our heads and hearts, I wonder what comes to mind? Feel free to jot down thoughts in the margins of your bulletin as we explore together what this beatitude is calling for and asking of our lives. And now, let us join our voices to sing this refrain about rejoicing in God’s blessings.

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### **Isaiah 55:1-3**

Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

## Matthew 5:6

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”

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What are you hungry for?

Over and over, our scriptures use the metaphors of hunger and thirst to talk about our desires, what we long for in our lives, what we pursue. Jesus spoke of Living Water that quenched the spirit, so you would never be thirsty again. He performed miracles to satisfy the hunger of the gathered crowds. Our Psalmist refers to deer that pant for water by the flowing streams of God's mercy.

We all know what it is to hunger and thirst... or do we? In our Western world, we have little concept of hunger and thirst the way they did in Jesus' day, before refrigerators, freezers, microwaves, or fast food chains. In the agrarian society of the Middle East, Jesus and his listeners would have known an entirely different struggle for food and drink. The need to walk MILES each day in order to have enough water to survive. The constant food prep and careful storage of harvests to carry you through a hard winter or a scorching summer. Starvation was often just a few meals away. They would have known a different intensity around these words – hunger and thirst – than we do. This soul deep ache from within, yearning to be filled, is what Jesus is talking about here – and there isn't any food or drink powerful enough to satisfy a longing that deep!

There is a deep ache inside each and every one of us that seeks out a sense of meaning and purpose that is bigger than self. This hunger can lead to a positive searching after God and God's desires for our life, or a rabbit hole of trying desperately to fill the void we feel in our hearts. Too often we turn to that which does not satisfy... sure, it might bring temporary happiness, but at the end of the day, it just leaves us wanting more. We try to assuage the longing with things like wealth and status, drugs and alcohol, THINGS that make us happy, if only for a short while. In many ways, happiness is like a treadmill... when we attain happiness with things that won't last, our hunger translates to something else before long, and we're left always wanting more!

But in this Beatitude, Jesus promises that when we hunger and thirst for RIGHTEOUSNESS... we are blessed and will be filled! Rather than longing for that

which will not satisfy, we have to somehow shift our focus and recognize that we can hunger and thirst, desire and strive and pursue righteousness instead of self-satisfaction and fleeting happiness.

But what exactly does Jesus mean by righteousness? **Righteousness** means that you do right things. In a very basic “Sunday School” understanding, that could mean going to church on Sundays, praying before each meal, reading your bible, forgiving others when they do you wrong. But there's so much more to righteousness than this! Throughout the Bible, righteousness is often linked with justice – for doing right in God's eyes, means acting justly, treating others with respect and dignity. To love and to live with justice. To seek justice and to do good. A righteous person consistently reflects God's will through their actions.

A thirst for righteousness would draw our whole selves into a desire and pursuit for that which is right with God. Righteousness is NOT being holier than thou! That is self-righteous, and can lead to holy extremism! When we hold ourselves and our system of beliefs above others, thinking that we have it all right and others are all wrong can lead to devastating effects. Look at yesterday's shooting in the synagogue in Pittsburg. A man who walks into a place of worship with an automatic rifle and begins shooting people because they are different than he is – is anything but righteous!

A pursuit of righteousness, a hunger and thirst for what is right, would have to encompass the desires and the heart of God. Is it easy to always pursue the “right” thing? No! In fact, some people say that this is the most demanding beatitude. Because truly living it out requires a constant seeking after God's will...

BUT Jesus is not saying, “Blessed are the righteous”, as if only those who can attain righteousness are blessed, but no, he says, “blessed are those who hunger and thirst for it”, who desire it, as if their whole lives depended on it. We are called to pursue it, to strive for it – this right living as individuals and as a community, but there seems to be built in an understanding that it will be complicated. It's not always easy to do what is right by God. Sometimes that means giving up our power and status... sometimes it means making sacrifices in our own lives for the good of others.

This morning, we are kicking off our Stewardship Campaign, and for the next four weeks, we will each be asked to give what we can to support the ministry of our church. We will all be asked to look ahead to 2019, taking time to

plan our budgets in advance so we know how generous we are able to be, supporting God's work through our church. For me, giving is one way that I live out my righteousness... that I strive to do what is right in the eyes of God with the resources I have been given. I was raised in a household where tithing – giving 10% of your income – was the norm. While it took me a few years after graduation and working full-time to increase to that level, it is something that we work to maintain, even when it's hard. For us, it's a sacrificial gift and commitment, trusting that God's good work is done through our church, and that our gifts are needed to keep that work thriving! And I have to admit that it feels good to give! There is a sense of satisfaction that comes with doing the right thing, sharing what I have with those in need, supporting God's work through this church and celebrating the way it influences individuals and our community as a whole. I know that I was a part of that, and it brings me deep joy knowing the positive impact I can have when I give to the church. I hope you know that same joy as you give to the church – trusting that your gifts make a difference in the lives of others!

In this Beatitude, Jesus gives us the reassurance that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness WILL BE FILLED! The longings deep within will be quenched as we strive toward right relationship with God and with others. I pray that you know the deep satisfaction that comes with pursuing righteousness, and that you never tire of doing what is right, what is good, and what is pleasing in the eyes of God. Amen.