



247 Broad Street | Red Bank NJ 0770
(732) 747-0446 | www.umcredbank.org

November 4, 2018

The Beatitudes – “Blessed Are Those Who Mourn”

Intro to Worship

This morning we turn to the Beatitude “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” Each time I read this verse, I’m struck by its counter intuitiveness, and yet it’s deep truth. None of us likes to mourn... and yet our grief and sorrow is met with comfort, and we usually make it through wiser and stronger. This morning we will dig deeper into this beatitude, looking for the blessings that come with grief, as we celebrate All Saints Day, reading the rolls of our new saints – those who have been baptized into our fellowship, as well as those who have died, joining the eternal Community of Saints. With our thoughts turning toward mourning, let us sing this refrain together about rejoicing in God’s blessings.

Isaiah 61:1-3

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion— to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, to display his glory.

Matthew 5:4 – “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”

Don't worry, be happy!

Turn that frown upside down!

Did you know it takes more muscles to frown than it does to smile?

Come on, get happy!

Why the long face? Smile! Put on a happy face!

This sentiment is repeated so much in our culture, we don't even hear it. This pervasive message that sadness is bad. Happy! Happy is what we should be, all the time, every day! ---- Who are we kidding! As much as we would wish for life to only be joy filled, we know that life doesn't always go our way. Our bodies are imperfect, complex systems which are constantly fighting off disease and infirmity, and sometimes they lose. Accidents happen and mistakes are made, and we are left in the rubble, trying to sort out the mess left behind. Grief is something that we are all familiar with... our lives are marked with deep losses; whether the loss of loved ones, friendships, relationships, marriages, careers, or hopes and dreams for our future.

While this is a reality we have to face, we don't have to like it. Whenever possible, we sprint through the valley of the shadow of death. We use Kubler Ross' steps of grief as hurdles that we can bound over if we run fast enough, and when grief lingers, people ask us why we haven't "gotten over it yet." It is into this reality that we hear Jesus's words, "Blessed are those who mourn." Really Jesus! Of all the paradoxes in the Beatitudes, this is the most dramatic. Bible scholar William Barclay writes, "It's an astonishing thing to speak of the joy of sorrow, of the gladness of grief, and of the bliss of the brokenhearted."

The Greek word used here for mourning is the strongest in its family... it's the kind of grief that takes hold of a person, the sorrow which brings an ache to the heart and unrestrainable tears to the eyes. Commentators argue that there are three things that cause this level of grief; personal loss, mourning our social reality, and sorrowing over sin and mistakes we've made.

First, this personal loss strikes to the heart. We experience this grief when we lose a family member or close friend. You may have never known this deep grief yet, but you will... As there is a time to be born, there is also a time to die. Our faith teaches us that when we die, our spirits are released from these mortal bodies and return to God. While our loved ones are at rest and peace, we are left to mourn... missing their presence in our lives. While we do not like to

experience mourning and sorrow, there is a great deal we can learn about ourselves and others in these times of grief.

But we don't just mourn those individuals and things we've lost. The second thing we mourn is the way the world is unfolding around us. We mourn the upswing in prejudice, we mourn war and violence, we mourn the destruction of our environment. We mourn the way our society seems to be fueled with more and more hate and blame, division and othering. While personal loss and mourning is very real and consuming, we are social creatures who live in an interconnected social structure. What happens outside our homes, in our communities and political arenas, in the board rooms and even in foreign countries, matters to us. This beatitude could be rephrased to say, "Blessed is the one who cares intensely for the sufferings, sorrows, and needs of others."

According to Biblical scholars and commentators, the third thing we mourn is the grief that comes from personal SIN, from the brokenness that results from our harmful actions and inactions. Through this interpretation, we are reminded of the first word of Jesus ministry, "Repent!" and called to grieve our sin and the harm we've caused. Only when we are sorry for the sins we've committed, mourning our mistakes, can we truly seek repentance, righting relationships with those we've wronged, and with God. The comfort that comes through this beatitude is not so much a soothing of heartbreak and loss, but rather, the joy of forgiveness.

Regardless of which way you interpret the mourning in this text, personal loss, grieving social circumstances, or sorrow over sin, we still are faced with the conundrum of this beatitude – Blessed (which is often translated as "happy" or "fortunate") are you who mourn. What was Jesus thinking? Are those who mourn blessed because they enjoy mourning? No! The blessing in this beatitude comes not from the first part of the verse, but from the second. Blessed are those who mourn, **for they shall be comforted**. The blessing does not lie in the experience of mourning, but in the comfort that arises from it.

In the midst of our grief, we are comforted by individuals who act as our angels, sitting with us in silence when there are no words, crying with us until the tears dry up, praying with and for us, even when we can't feel the Spirit move, and when it's time, helping us step from our grief back into the world, one day at a time. We are blessed in our mourning, not because we grieve, but because **COMFORT will come**. One of the names given to the Holy Spirit is Comforter because it is when we need God the most that the Spirit of God

pours out comfort. We may not see it as coming from God, as all too often, we are angels put to task by the inspiration of the Spirit. We may even feel that God has abandoned us in our grief, but our scripture today reminds us that yes, God's comfort WILL BE GIVEN. We will be comforted.

And we don't just do this alone or with family and friends, but there is comfort that comes from grieving with a church community, as well. Brené Brown, research professor, author and storyteller, is convinced that our faith re-grounds us and reminds us that we are not alone. She argues that we are inextricably connected to each other by something greater than us, and when we are grieving, whether a personal loss, lamenting over the social chaos that exists in our nation and world, or mourning the mistakes we've made – whatever grief it is that holds us, coming together to worship, singing and holding hands with strangers, passing the peace with people we might not like or agree with 6 days of the week, reminds us that we are not alone. That we are connected and surrounded by a God that is rooted in love, compassion, and community, whether or not we can feel it yet.

Comfort. Comfort is the blessing that is promised in our beatitude today. Comfort which gives us freedom to grieve, to know that it is OK to be sad, to not be smiling all the time... As Ecclesiastes reminds us, there is a time to mourn and a time to dance. May we know that when our time comes for mourning – and it will – that we WILL be comforted by the Spirit of God that embraces us in our grief, our family and friends that surround us in love, and our church community through which we remember that we are part of a whole much bigger than ourselves. May the God of all Love and Comfort bless and surround us as we grieve, and when the time is right, may our mourning turn into dancing. Amen.