

October 21, 2018

The 5th Beatitude

Matthew 4:23-5:7

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²³ Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. ²⁴ So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them. ²⁵ And great crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from beyond the Jordan.

⁵¹ When Jesus saw *the crowds*, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ² Then Jesus began to speak, and taught them, saying:

³ “**BLESSED** are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ “**BLESSED** are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

⁵ “**BLESSED** are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ “**BLESSED** are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

⁷ “**BLESSED** are the *merciful*, for they will receive *mercy*.

John 8:2-11

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

² Early in the morning [Jesus] came again to the temple [from the Mount of Olives]. *All the people*

The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) are identified as the essential teaching of Jesus. Recorded in Matthew, within the larger section of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) they have been taken seriously from literal to metaphorical, from concrete pragmatic directives to poetic unrealistic hopes of how heaven is. They include a tension between now, and what is to come, as each beatitude contains the first verb in the present tense, with a dependent clause articulated in the future tense. The first group of 4 beatitudes (5:3-6) is made up of 36 words (in the original Greek) closing with a reference to righteousness as does the second group (5:7-10), they are bound together with a strong literary influence from Isaiah 61 and the alliteration of the letter p (or π in Greek).

the crowds: While the crowd seems like a faceless mass, the text implies that it's made up of all those we've heard about suffering from illness, disease and social rejection in Matthew 5:23-24.

BLESSED: in Greek – μακάριος; pronounced [**MAKARIOS**]: most often translated as “blessed,” “fortunate,” or “happy.” In the Ancient World could also mean “wealthy,” seeming to be tied to a notion of blessing related to material well-being, given by the gods. Here then Jesus seems to be saying something radically diverging from the established social-religious notion of blessing as possessing lots or good things. Some modern translations place the meaning of the word as “congratulations.” Some scholars lift up the dynamic momentum underneath the word which is not just an adjective, but a call to action and engagement extended to those who don't usually see themselves as actors worthy, capable and needed to participate in the transformation and redemption of the world. In that line of thought μακάριος could be translated as “Let's roll!” “Get up! Get going!” “Let's do this thing!” or the common Spanish expression “*Vamos!*”

mercy :: ἔλεος pronounced [*eleos*] meaning: mercy, pity, compassion. When the Hebrew Bible is translated into Greek this word is used for the Hebrew word חַסֵד :: pronounced [*cheded*] meaning human kindness, especially as extended to the lowly, needy and miserable. Human kindness is itself a reflection of divine kindness: how God looks to the needs of creation as per the divine covenants God has made with humanity.

Later in Matthew 9 Jesus is criticized by the Pharisees for the seemingly epicurean and laxidizaical way in which he lives, consorting with tax collectors and others who are not demed to be “godly people.” In that encounter Jesus again speaks of mercy as the way to understand his person, preaching and passion:

¹¹ When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” ¹² But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, ...

came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. ³ *The scribes and the Pharisees* brought a woman who had been **caught in adultery**; and making her stand before all of them, ⁴ they said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. ⁵ Now *in the law* Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, BEGINNING WITH THE ELDERS; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” ¹¹ She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What grabs your attention in this reading?**
- **What does the word mercy mean to you?**
- **When do you use it?; hear it used in daily life?**
- **We want people to show us mercy, of course, but do you show mercy to others?**
- **What are the politics of mercy?... in the story of John 8? ... in your life and relationships? ... our world? How does the story of mercy in John 8 intersect your own story and life?**
- **How can we/you become people of mercy?**
- **To whom do you not want to show mercy?**
- **How do you imagine the life of the woman in John 8 after this story? How might she have practiced the politics of mercy going forward? Why? How does that story intersect with your own today?**

but those who are sick. ¹³ Go and learn what this means, ***‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’*** For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”

The context: All the people came to him and he began to teach them...The scribes and the Pharisees: It’s easy for the crowd of unnamed people to disappear in our mind’s eye as we hear the story. The religious leaders interrupt the public lesson . They were from two schools of religious thoughts, both zealous in following the law as it was taught orally (the Pharisees) and insisting upon the sacredness of the written Torah Law (the scribes). They break into the conversation with a test for Jesus, seeking to teach him who is in charge. And yet they themselves get “schooled” in the encounter. What did the mass of anonymous people in the crowd learn, receive and experience in that encounter?

caught in adultery ... in the law Stoning was one of the primary methods of capital punishment in the Old Testament. It was the form of capital punishment for several crimes (Jacobs, 1964) including stealing (Joshua, 7:20-26), Sabbath breaking (Numbers, 15:32-36), preaching or practicing a different religion, blasphemy (Lev, 24:10- 16), cursing God and the king (Kings, 21:1-16), being a medium or a wizard (Levi, 20:27) and even for being a stubborn or rebellious son (Deuteronomy, 21:18-21). It was also the established punishment for adultery: ***“If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death.” Deuteronomy 20:10.*** Curiously, as scholars point out only the woman is brought, not the man (or men) also caught in adultery, as it takes two to adulterer, ***as the law asserts.***

BEGINNING WITH THE ELDERS the implication is that those with the most wisdom realized the just challenge of Jesus to their hypocritical and partial reading of the scripture.