

## Blessed Are....

When Solomon becomes the new king of Israel, one of his jobs is to settle disputes.

You know the most famous one he settles.

Two women show up, both claiming to be the mother of one infant.

Solomon's solution is pure genius...

Chop the baby in two, and give half to each woman.

Both women stand ready to sacrifice, the first is ready to sacrifice the child..... while the second is ready to sacrifice herself for the sake of the child.

The Jewish people in the time of Jesus expected the messiah.

But the messiah they expected was a warrior king, who would through war and violence free the people from Roman domination, who would sacrifice Roman lives for Jewish freedom.

Instead, here is Jesus, who sacrifices himself so that every human being can be free.

And here we are today, like women standing before Solomon, like Pilate standing before Jesus, and what are we Christians to do?

Our new president has begun a course that seems intent on fulfilling his campaign promises, beginning with a wall along the Mexican border intending to keep out our southern sisters and brothers seeking a better life.

And Jesus says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

The new administration announces restrictions on people of the Muslim faith entering our country, particularly Muslims living in countries now destroyed because of previous policies of our own country.

And Jesus says: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

We hear daily of the elimination of regulations intended to safeguard our food and water and environment, of an embrace of fossil fuel development despite the overwhelming scientific evidence that such fuel is dangerously heating up the planet with potentially catastrophic results, not for us, but for our children and grandchildren.

And Jesus says: "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

We hear of the evisceration of the health care law with no comprehensive replacement in sight, something that will particularly harm our friends from Micronesia and the Marshall Islands because they are barred from receiving Medicaid.....

And Jesus says: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

Just the other day, the President was touting torture as a legitimate means of interrogation in our country, something that our laws and even every member of his own US Senate reject.

And Jesus says: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy."

Meanwhile, the State of Israel expands illegal settlements in violation of international law, as our government plans to move our embassy to Jerusalem, something likely to ignite more bloodshed and violence in that scarred land.

And Jesus says: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

What is the Christian response in these our times?

Perhaps it is returning to the truth of our faith.

Our faith invites us to enter a kingdom, a kingdom that calls us to see "the other with the same mercy we wish for ourselves.....to recognize that what we most hate in others is often a reflection of what we most hate in ourselves." Flood, *Healing the Gospel*, 92.

Our faith is all about sacrifice, but NOT about sacrificing "the other."

"God, in Jesus, doesn't receive a sacrifice, God becomes the sacrifice.

Instead of us reaching up to God, God reaches down to us.

God, in Christ, becomes the sacrifice through the cross," and we who claim him as Lord are called to do precisely the same thing! Id, 32, paraphrased.

Jesus, God in the flesh, comes to us and lives the life he calls us to live.

He doesn't engage in violence.

He trusts absolutely in the faithfulness of God.

He neither fights nor flees, but rather, he endures, which is the true definition of meekness; he dies; and on the third day is raised again, the first born of the dead: the promise of what awaits us all if only we will tag along....

And yet, it is so hard.....

What does Christian living look like?

The answer is right here.

It looks like the beatitudes, it looks like the sermon on the mount.

The beatitudes are the upside down blessings we hear today.

The sermon on the mount extends these blessings in ways that are equally strange, equally true, like love your enemies, do good to those who harm us, give the shirt too when the coat is taken.

"In a word", Jesus says, 'Grow up!

Now you are Kingdom subjects.

Live like it!

Live out your God-created identity!

Live generously and graciously toward others, because that's the way God lives towards you." Mt 5:48 (The Message Tr.)

The sermon on the mount is the constitution of the Christian faith.

It is the central principal around which we, the church, exist.

It insists upon God's preference for the poor, the wounded, the lost and the outcast.

This insistence is a devastating departure from the way our society organizes itself, from the recent pronouncements coming from Washington DC.

That way praises life on our terms; life we pretend to control.

Jesus lives life on God's terms; a life God controls.

Poverty, meekness and mourning bring us face to face with Reality - the Reality that we are all in this life together, that in the end there are only two truths: that we are dust and to dust shall we return; and that we are the beloved children of God.

So much for our obsessions with holding onto what's "mine," when all we have that separates us from a pile of dirt is the breath that God gives us to breathe — when our only hope when we close our eyes for the last time is the continued faithfulness of this same God who loves all of humanity, especially the least, the lost, the weird....

Our way separates us from one another.

God's way unites us, because "God is a power that moves everything there is toward everything else that is, the very definition of God's peace is restoring relationships: between God and people..... between people..... and between people and the earth." Shea, *Spiritual Wisdom of the Gospels*, 69, paraphrased.

And so the constant challenge we face, every day, is this: shall we admire Jesus or shall we follow Him?

If we admire him, we can hold tight to the world's way of doing things, a way that the new administration is clearly promoting.

But if we choose to follow him, then what is needed is a leap of faith.

A leap rooted in the conviction that "meekness is the way of God, that righteousness and peace will prevail, and that God's future is a time of mercy, not cruelty." 8 New Inter Bible, 181.

Paul says just this in his letter today to the people at Corinth.

Corinth is a town created for and settled by freed slaves.

By the time Paul gets here, it's a town becoming gentrified, with a divide growing ever greater between the haves and the have-nots.

So Paul today reminds these many upper class and middle class folk that God reveals himself in weakness, in need, in poverty, uprooting the blossoming weed of "trust in self" and planting the foolishness of the cross.

"Where is your God?"

"He's there, hanging from the tree."

As more of the world's population seems to prefer separation and isolation and walls, let's never forget that "your neighbor shares your humanity with you.

This partnership cuts through all barriers of land and language, wealth and poverty, knowledge and ignorance.

We are one..... created from the same dust..... subject to the same laws..... destined for the same end. H. Nouwan.

We are held by the God whose name is compassion, who is "mercy, within mercy, within mercy," meaning, "we are captured by grace," and our calling, our task, yes, our duty, is to share this compassion and grace with everyone ..... everywhere.

Rohr quoting Merton.

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