

**Be Happy - The Meek and Those Who  
Hunger and Thirst for Justice 1-31-2010**  
By Mary Jane Button-Harrison

**Matthew 5:1-12**

5When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2Then he 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.

8 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Today we pick back up with the third in a series of five sermons on the blessings that Jesus gives at the beginning of his sermon on the mount recorded in the gospel of Matthew. These blessings, called Beatitudes, are Jesus' attempt to share what brings true happiness; what characteristics and values and behaviors and attitudes bring us

closest to God's intention and hope for we humans. In these "blessings," Jesus is saying that for citizens of God's realm here on earth, life doesn't come in the pursuit of happiness. Rather happiness comes in the pursuit of God's way, in living and relating and loving in ways that enlarge life and express grace and gratitude. Happiness comes as a result of seeking first the kingdom of God.

Today we focus on the third and fourth beatitudes: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be filled." These blessings turn conventional wisdom on its head. Who shall inherit the earth? Conventional wisdom would suggest that those with the most weapons and money and power and might would win the prize. But here, Jesus says it is the meek.

Some associate meekness with weakness. In fact, a couple of dictionaries have, as a part of their definition of meekness, "Easily imposed on; submissive;" or even "spineless." But that is probably not what Jesus is talking about here. In the Bible, both Moses and Jesus

are called meek - which is a virtue. In the Old Testament book of Numbers, chapter 12, verse three, it says, "Now the man Moses was very meek, more than all people who were on the face of the earth." Moses was certainly no pushover. And yet here, he is extolled for being the most meek person on earth! Surely this does not mean he was the most spineless or submissive person on earth. I don't think he could have led the people out of slavery in Egypt if that were his character.

Then there is Jesus. Further on in Matthew's gospel, Jesus is recorded as saying, "<sup>28</sup>Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup>Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." (KJV) Again, this is good news; this is someone who has a mission in life and it is to free people from the things that bind them, just like Moses. That is hardly the picture of someone who is submissive or spineless! Rather, that is someone who is strong and gentle; wise and trustworthy.

Moses and Jesus actually were submissive. But they weren't spineless and they weren't pushovers. Rather, they were submissive to the call of God in their lives. They were submissive to God's vision for how things are supposed to be and they allowed themselves to be used by God in order to bring life and wholeness and healing to the people. They were strong enough to know who to be submissive to and who not to. Since they were so confident in their calling and purpose, they didn't seem to get caught up in themselves or in a need for fame or glory or accolades. Rather, they were committed to something bigger than and beyond themselves and their peers which gave them a quiet strength in the face of adversity. That is why you feel more secure and at peace in the presence of someone who is meek. They seem to emanate the phrase that's been popularized in the last several years, "it's not about me." They don't fill the room with their needs and presence and desire for attention, but rather make room for others to be present and heard and cared for inspiring them to be better selves.

When my children were little, Tim and I found this really goofy movie that made us laugh, called, "Mom and Dad Save the World." In that movie, an earth mom and dad get transported in their station-wagon to some unknown, faraway, tiny planet called Spengo; named after the *great* (hear ridiculous) ruler, Todd Spengo (played by Jon Lovitz). Todd Spengo was a very bad ruler because he was so insecure in his own skin. Sincee he was so lacking in confidence and so needing of attention and praise, he would strut around making people do silly things in order to make him feel important. And in order to "prove" his superiority, Todd decided he would blow up the earth. At one point, Marge, the mom from earth, just flat out asks this ruler, "Todd, are you insecure?" To which he replies in a really loud voice, "If I were insecure, would I be talking in such a loud voice?" I just love that line because it exposes a basic truth that the more attention we crave, the more we want the world to focus on us, the more we expect others to bend to our will, usually, the less confidence and sense of purpose and

grace a person has, and the things they do to try to fill that hole usually end up creating a bigger hole.

A person who is meek understands that they are a beloved child of God ... just like everybody else. They are special ... but not more special than others. Their lives and experiences are important ... but not more important than anyone else. They make mistakes and are in need of God's grace and human forgiveness ... just like everybody else. And they are called by God to participate in the building of God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, right along-side others, and it's all good. A person who is meek doesn't need to be more than or greater than others in order to rest assured in God's strength and love.

I don't know if the order of the beatitudes is intentional or not, but I see a connection between the meek and those who hunger and thirst for justice. For you see, if you understand in a fundamental way, that you are no more or less deserving than anyone else, that God loves everyone completely, that God suffers when one of God's children suffers, then you will not be able to just stand by and watch people

starve or be slaves or be abused in various ways because you know that is not God's dream for those God created and loves like you. When you understand that you are not separate from, but part of the human family, then you ask why when you see suffering and pain and death for what affects another affects you and affects Christ and drives your passion and action to make things better for all.

One of those modern-day saints who would surely have been called meek in the sense of Jesus and Moses is Mother Teresa as she fed and clothed and touched the poor and marginalized in Calcutta, India. She understood about hunger and thirst; both physical and emotional and the need to be bearers of love and to treat each person as if they were Christ. She once said of those with whom she lived and worked, "Each one of them is Jesus in disguise." And she lived out of the words of the prophet, "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with you God."

The truth of Jesus' teachings, and especially the Beatitudes, is that we can spend a whole life chasing after things that we think we

want; things we think will make us happier or smarter or more loveable or wealthy or powerful. And culture is only too eager to step in and tell us what those things are. But then Jesus comes along and says that's not what brings life and happiness. There is more. For it is actually in losing our life that we find ourselves, it is in giving that we receive, it is in seeing Jesus in each person that we grow deeper in faith and more loving in action. To understand that we are connected to others in ways we cannot understand, but only experience; to truly hunger and thirst for what is right and just and to be an extension of God's loving kindness and abundance, is to be blessed and filled. Emptiness awaits us when we chase after our own needs to look good or feel good - when we live as though it's all about us. To know there's something more to live for than our own desires and whims... to find God's purpose and calling and tap into that is to be blessed and filled. There is something more. Amen.