

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time – A

Suppose you are walking down the street and you see a friend walking toward you. You greet him with a “Hi, how are you doing?”

And he responds by saying, ‘I am so blessed!’ What would you think would come next?

One or the other of us might expect him to go on to say, “I have such a good life. Loving wife. Good job. Smart kids who are going to make a difference. My sports teams are winning...”

There could be any number of things a person could list as their “blessings.”

One of the things that confronts us when we read the beatitudes is that nothing like that makes Jesus’ list.

The beatitudes of Jesus are similar to if your friend responded to your question by saying, “I am so blessed! I not making any progress on my own. My life is so tenuous that I know better than to be complacent. I can see so many things that need to be changed, that it’s clear to me that God will have to intervene.”

We might not see at all how he considers himself blessed.

That was the problem that Jesus felt the need to address: the people did not see how they were blessed.

What they saw was how the

oppression of a foreign power and their own religious elite had created a poverty so deep that it was crushing the spirit right out of them.

They were in a constant state of mourning and had been reduced to a meekness that seemed to have no option beyond hungering and thirsting for more equitable treatment, for a more just allocation of resources.

Jesus sees that, too. He sees the social reality, the terrible toll it is taking, and the eagerness to change it.

What Jesus sees that his hearers don’t is that, at the center of that struggle, there is a blessedness given by God.

And because it is given by God it is, by definition, more powerful than the system that threatens to overwhelm them.

This blessedness is the kingdom of heaven—already present, but working its way toward becoming more complete.

The kingdom of heaven cannot be stopped, only delayed, and it has already begun to take root.

It is moving mourning toward comfort, meekness toward inheritance, and hunger and thirst toward satisfaction.

It is giving notice to the present situation that it is not ultimate and will

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not last.

Precisely at human evil's most destructive moment the kingdom of heaven is still present.

Human evil, even at its most devastating, cannot destroy God's gift.

That's the awareness Jesus is calling his hearers to. It's easy to be in touch with oppression and pain, and to be fearful of its power.

What is needed and what Jesus provides is the awareness of our own blessedness in spite of that.

Because he is pointing out the presence of the kingdom of heaven, the one thing that will last into eternity, there is reason for hope.

And that hope brings energy. The second four beatitudes all portray what happens when people are brought into the awareness of their blessedness in the midst of their pain and suffering.

Their blessedness flows outward, in the form of mercy that, once offered, expands and becomes more abundant, to giver and receiver alike, and becomes an atmosphere in which all are invited to breathe.

When the blessedness generates a clean heart, a heart that realizes its essential dependence on God, it can

see how all things are grounded in God.

When the blessedness flows out in peacemaking, relationships are restored—a sure sign that God is active.

When the blessedness leads to a righteous life, a life in communion with God and neighbor, the unjust social system has to give way, even if it puts up a fight while doing so.

Evil knows its day is over, and so spins out of control in a frenzy of persecution.

So, it is a time to rejoice and be glad, for heaven is unfolding on earth.

Can we accept the challenge that the beatitudes pose in our day and age?

Can we see the blessedness existing at the center of our struggles, a blessedness put there by none other than God himself, which will not be overwhelmed and will not rest until it comes to full flower.