

Those Who Mourn

A Sermon on Matthew 5:4

I have to say, when Reverend Sue suggested the Beatitudes as a sermon series, I was delighted. I love the Beatitudes and I was excited after reading the sermon from last week to see that you all got off to a good running start with them. I do have one quick correction to offer, which is not fair because Sue isn't here to defend herself, but I think it's important for how we understand the beatitude for today.

Here's the correction: though the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is presented in Matthew like Jesus just sat down and spoke it, it's more likely that the author of the gospel of Matthew was collecting together common teachings of Jesus, things he always used to say. Jesus was always saying things like,

“Blessed are the peacemakers. (Matt. 5:9)

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. (Matt. 5:6)

Blessed are those who mourn. (Matt. 5:4)

You are the salt of the earth. (Matt. 5:13)

You are the light of the world. (Matt. 5:14)

A city on a hill cannot be hidden.” (Matt. 5:14)

I think it's important that these were things that Jesus was always saying, because our beatitude for this morning is, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted,” and I think remembering what people always used to say is a way that we comfort ourselves and mourn all at the same time. My friend Jessica, who died earlier this year, she was always saying, “It's never too late to follow your dreams.” She had left a career and gone back to school to major in voice because she her dream was to be an opera singer. I believe she would have done it too, if she had been given more time.

My pawpaw, my grandfather, didn't say much, but one thing he was always saying to my grandmother was, “Jo, we gotta take care of Cindy.” Cindy's my mother, the middle of three daughters. I think this is a beautiful thing, this kind man making sure that the child who doesn't get the same attention as the oldest or the youngest was given extra love. My mother and brothers and I were always over at my grandparents' house, being taken care of. I have many fond memories there.

So as we focus ourselves for the sermon, I want you to think of something that someone who is no longer with us was always saying, some story that you tell to your friends or your children or your grandchildren. Hold that memory of who that person was in your mind and your heart for just a moment.

And would you pray with me?

God, you have told us that we are blessed. Help us see that. And may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Now, what I usually like to do in a sermon is give some historical context, look at where the passage we're focused on is in respect to the verses before and after it, maybe throw some Greek in there, all so that we have a better understanding of this book that is sacred to us.

I don't feel the need to do that with the beatitude for today. I don't feel the need to do that because grief is a universal human experience. We come into this world crying and our pain only

gets deeper from there. I know many people in this room have experience deep grief in their lives, and so have deep experience with both mourning and comfort. There are many places in the Bible where Jesus's lived experience differs from ours. Grief is not one of them.

We know that Jesus mourns. We see him mourning over Jerusalem. (Matt. 23:37-39) We see him try to take time for himself after the death of John the Baptist. (Matt. 14:13-14) We see him crying at the death of his friend Lazarus. (John 11:35)

In fact, the Bible itself is no stranger to mourning. It is full of stories of people who are mourning and who are seen by God. Take this psalm for this morning for example, (Psalm 42) or the story of Hagar, Sarai's handmaiden, her slave. (Genesis 16) Hagar is so moved that God comes to her in her time of deep pain and grief that changes what she calls God. She calls God the one who sees me. The Bible tells us that God sees grief.

And that is what this beatitude is telling us as well. Jesus sees the mourning that is happening all around him, that still happens today. He sees the pain. And he turns to those in pain and he says, you are blessed. I see you. I have not forgotten about you. You are blessed.

It is a miraculous thing that Jesus says here, because we do not think that those who mourn are blessed. I would offer up to you the fact that the world around us thinks that those who mourn are weak. We see this in the amount of time we allow people to mourn, the time they are allowed to take away from work in order to mourn, and the services that are available to those who have suffered a great loss. It is so often insufficient. And so many of us walk around wounded, limping for so long that it becomes part of our gait. We tell ourselves that we have to be OK, we tell others that we're fine, we allow everyone to tell us how strong we are, and all the while there is an ache inside us that is never really going to go away.

Because we think that those who mourn are weak, we walk around unhealed, uncomforted. We see that this is true when we look at those who suffered a loss early in life. Those who had a traumatic event in childhood, such as abuse, an illness, or losing or being separated from a parent or parents, bear the marks of that trauma [for the rest of their lives](#). The brain struggles to develop, the immune system flounders, and the body fails to become all that it could be, all because the body is trying to handle the stress that the child has encountered.

We see similar effects in adults too. The stress associated with grief can [literally break your heart](#), causing a condition that weakens your heart and makes it more difficult for your it to function. Stress, when left untreated and unchecked, can cause your body to [become less able to heal itself](#). As we hold in our pain, our muscles react, [tensing up and knotting themselves together until it can become difficult to move](#). Pain and loss put a weight on us that can be too much to bear, and we so often go about our days as if we have already set it down.

But that is not what Jesus tells us to do here. Jesus tells us to mourn, because those who mourn are blessed. If Jesus sees our pain, we should too. Why should we mourn? Because those who mourn will be comforted.

I think many of us have experienced that comfort after a loss, when our family and friends and community and church come together and wrap us up in support. We get this beatitude intuitively because we know that when grief visits our doorstep and we cry out to those around us, we will be comforted. This is a great and good thing that we as members of the Body of Christ try to do for each other, and it is a great and good grace when it happens in the world.

But what about when we mourn and are not comforted? What about the people around the world who mourn the loss of their loved ones because of war or famine or poverty? What about the people who mourn the loss of the lives they once had before disaster rolled into town? What about those who have suffered a tragedy that left a wound no amount of comfort could

heal? How long are we to wait for comfort? How long does anyone have to live with this blessed mourning?

Thankfully, not forever, not for eternity. We might be blessed when we mourn now, but we have been promised that in whatever world comes after this one, there will be no more mourning. There will be no more pain. All things will be made new and every tear will be wiped away by the God who loved us too much to stay apart from us. This is the picture painted by the end of Revelation, when there is a new heaven and a new earth. (Revelation 21:1-5) I'm not one to spend time lingering on eschatological fantasies, but I think one of the most beautiful promises in the Bible is that the tears of grief that are beyond comfort in this world will be wiped away in the next. Jesus has promised us that. He has *blessed* us with it.

So, what do we take away from our beatitude for this week? Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted? Well, I think the first thing we have to remember is that we are blessed when we mourn. Life brings pain to each of us and we need to allow ourselves to feel it, to mourn all our losses whenever they come, to be open to mourning whenever it comes to us again. I have a friend who found out she couldn't have children four or five years ago now, and she still mourns the loss of the future she had hoped to have. Blessed are those who mourn does not apply to only those living in the space between death and burial. Mourning walks with us in many seasons of our lives.

The second takeaway is those who mourn will be comforted, but that comfort may not come in the ways we expect. It may be the comfort of our loved ones or our community surrounding us. It may be the comfort of our faith, as the psalmist writes. It may be comfort that comes to us straight from God in this life, as Hagar experienced. Or it may be the comfort that can only be given when deep no longer has to call to deep but when we are reunited with the great Love of the universe which made us and longs to hold us, to wipe away each unconsolated tear from our eyes, and to offer us the comfort that will last for all eternity. Blessed are those who mourn, our Lord tells us, because they *will* be comforted.

Amen.