

Lately I have had many conversations with my three-year-old son about watching his attitude. I am not sure if he knows what this means yet, but it is something I am hoping desperately he learns and soon. You see our attitudes say a lot about who we are. They reflect the inner workings of our hearts. When we have a good attitude, it seems like we are more productive, we are more kind, we are more compassionate, and we are more attune to the presence of God working in the world. When we possess a good attitude, we are more able to see the needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When we have a bad attitude, life seems to become all about us, what we have and what we do not have. All throughout the Old Testament book of Exodus we see the Israelites had a bad attitude. They complained about leaving and being out in the wilderness. They tried to take more manna than they needed. They cared only about their instant gratification.

It is so easy to fall into this trap, into this type of negativity and as we all know “misery loves company.” So, this year I have a challenge for you, when you find yourself being negative, ask yourself the reason for your negativity and then try to change your attitude. You may just positively affect the lives of other people and even change your outlook on life all for the glory of God.

As we start our beatitudes sermon series today called “Blessed: Wisdom from the Beatitudes of Jesus” we must first understand what a beatitude is. Commentary tells us that the word “beatitude” comes from the Latin *beatitudo*, meaning “blessedness.”<sup>i</sup> In Matthew 5, Jesus pronounces blessings upon the people of God for possessing divine characteristics. In other words, as Marlin Harris describes it “The Beatitudes are God’s beauty in us...it is how God wants [God’s] attitude to be in us.”<sup>ii</sup>

All throughout his ministry, Jesus showed that the people closest to God were the poor and those who were humble. Time and time again Jesus shared parables about those who were poor and uplifted them. For instance, the widow’s mite, also when Jesus told the rich young man that he could not follow him until he gave away all his earthly possessions. The disciples immediately left the comfort of their lives and followed Christ. There is really something to this. What Christ was trying to show us is that we should always be wanting for God and seeking God.

Psalm 42:1-2 describes it this way: “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

God our Creator created us with a need to pursue God. The Holy Spirit helps us in this pursuit by leading us to God through Jesus Christ. When Jesus refers to those who are poor in spirit, he is talking about people who long for God.

It itself it sounds like the poor in spirit should be people in a negative category...I mean shouldn't we be going for rich in spirit? Yet, here Christ is talking about people who as commentary says, have a “lack of arrogance and sense of one's own need.” In our culture today, it may read “Blessed are those who long for the living God.”

In Augustine's “Confessions” he starts his book by saying “Our heart is restless, until it rests in you.”<sup>iii</sup> All throughout our lives we try to fill this restlessness with many things: earthly possessions, pride, money, success, popularity, and yet we find that none of these things can fill the hole in our soul. That hole is meant to be filled by God.

As Jesus talked about those being blessed who are poor in spirit, he reminds us that we are called to always seek after God. This is how we live into God's sanctifying grace. Our profession of faith in Jesus Christ is not the end of our discipleship, in fact, we spend the most time in our discipleship in God's sanctifying grace, where God continues to call us to love God and one another.

We live into this sanctification as we long for God's presence, as we long for the presence of the body of Christ to journey alongside us. We are blessed when we are poor in spirit because in our spiritual poverty our only security is in God. When we are poor in spirit, we must surrender our lives to God, and this is when true discipleship starts.

We are called not only to long for the living God, but we are also called to long for the kingdom of God coming to fruition. Jesus' second beatitude: “Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4), is not about people who are in mourning from losing a loved one. This passage of scripture refers to all of us who are mourning because the kingdom of God has not yet been fully realized.<sup>iv</sup>

Like those Christ was referring to, we are also living in this in-between time of already and not yet. Christ has already come, and Christ will come again, but He is not here yet.

While we wait, we do find ourselves in mourning. We mourn for starving children everywhere. We mourn that seven days into the new year there have already been seven homicides in D.C..<sup>v</sup>

We mourn that now more people than ever die every year from opioid overdoses than car accidents.<sup>vi</sup> We mourn that a seven-year-old girl named Jakelin Caal, died while she was being held at the border and we mourn that adults and children are living in tent cities in the desert, many who have been separated from their families.

We mourn that our country is divided, and we mourn that our church, The United Methodist Church is divided in our understanding on homosexuality.

We have much to mourn as we witness all the hurt and trauma people are experiencing in the world. We are called to mourn alongside those who have experienced the effects of injustice and oppression, because these are the very forces of wickedness we renounce when we profess our faith and enter this covenant with God.

We are called to mourn, but in our mourning, we cannot lose hope...because the good news is that Christ will return and when He does as Revelations 21:4 says: “Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

There are signs all around us that the kingdom of God is coming. Most recently I have seen these signs in all the ways that people have been caring for those furloughed by the government. Strangers are sending these workers pizza and food while they work without pay. Strangers are offering free meals as their restaurants and giving discounts Food banks have been extended to government workers. Fairfax County Public Schools held a hiring event for furloughed employees who were interested in becoming substitute teachers. There is hope all around us if we have the God-attitude to see it.

We are called to live in this in between time with hope. This is not the end. There is something better coming. I heard this story at Frank Huff’s Memorial Service, and I wanted to share it with you:

There was a woman with a terminal illness who made a strange request to her pastor. She told him she wanted to be buried with her favorite Bible and a fork in her right hand. When the pastor asked her why she explained: “In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main course were being cleared, someone would inevitably lean over and say, ‘You can keep your fork.’ It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming... like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. Something wonderful, and with substance!

So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder, ‘What’s with the fork?’ Then I want you to tell them: ‘Keep your fork... the best is yet to come.’”<sup>vii</sup>

This is the promise of our baptism. As we remember our baptism today and are thankful, we give thanks to God that through our relationship with God, no matter what happens in our life we will be blessed. This is God’s promise of new life to us today and every day.

As we remember our baptisms today, I want to take a moment and pour out the water into our baptismal font...

---- Pour out water -----

When we pour out this water, we remember that the Holy Spirit is poured out in our lives, this is the person in the Trinity who daily reminds us to long for the presence of God.

As we remember our baptism, we remember this blessed covenant we enter into through our faith in Jesus Christ. Today I brought a shell for each of you to keep after you remember your baptism. This will be a symbol for you to hold onto hope even on your hardest days.

As you come to the font today, I will say, “Remember your baptism and be thankful, then I will trace the cross on your forehead or the back of your hand. Come forward and take a shell remembering that God’s hope is always available to you as are the living waters of baptism through your faith. Also notice that we have lit the Christ candle today as we remember that Christ is with us in this action of remembering our baptism.

As we find blessing in poverty of spirit, and mourning the fragility of this life, may we always remember that through Jesus Christ, the best is yet to come.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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Remembrance of Baptismal Covenant

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-are-the-beatitudes-701505>

<sup>ii</sup> Marlin J. Harris. “The Beatitudes Bible Study: Group Leader Guide.” WestBow Press: Bloomington, IN. 2006. P. 1.

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.ewtn.com/library/SPIRIT/restlessheart.htm>

<sup>iv</sup> “The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary.” Vol. VIII. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 1995.

<sup>v</sup> <https://wjla.com/news/crime/police-7-killed-dc-2019>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.healthline.com/health-news/deaths-from-opioid-overdoses-higher-than-car-accident-fatalities#1>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.littlethings.com/woman-buried-with-fork/1>

## Additional Resource

“The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible.” Vol 1. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. 2006.