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Waterford Mennonite Church
“Speak Into Being” – Dwelling in the Word, Matthew 5:1-12
September 1, 2019

Today is our third Sunday of Dwelling in the Word with the Beatitudes. The first Sunday provided an overview to the series and to this understanding of what is a blessing. The Hebrew word for blessing, *barak*, means God’s promise of regard, presence, and accompaniment. Part of the overview also consisted of looking at where this text falls within the broader book of Matthew, highlighting how the Sermon on the Mount is Jesus’ first major teaching. Therefore, we paid close attention to how Jesus chooses to usher in the new kingdom and initiate the new community. Jesus begins by saying “You are blessed. I promise my presence with you.”

We were also reminded that the beatitudes are descriptive and not prescriptive. Jesus was describing the gathered faith community and naming the attributes that are esteemed within the new kingdom. Furthermore we noted that the gathered community is then given the charge to hand out these blessings to each other - this new kingdom is to be a kingdom of blessing and not cursing. The morning ended by being challenged to reclaim the power and promise in the words, “God bless you.”

Last Sunday we looked at the first three beatitudes – blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek. Pastor Katie began and ended her sermon by asking, “Do you need a blessing today?” Throughout her sermon she taught us how these three beatitudes create a posture of dependence and need for God which sets the tone for the rest of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. Katie asserted that this dependence is best recognized when we can name and claim our own brokenness. When we are poor in spirit we see our need for Jesus. Then Katie invited us to bring our brokenness and mess to church and be blessed. Katie assured us that we

don't have to have it all together, nor even pretend that we do. Instead we are invited, just as we are, and Jesus wants to give us a blessing.

This morning then we move to looking at the next three beatitudes. So reading again beginning in verse six. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."

These next three beatitudes seem to straddle our inner and outer worlds. The first and third beatitudes speak of our inner life – what we hunger and thirst for, the state of our hearts and souls. The middle beatitude speaks of our posture towards others and our ability to grant mercy, forgiveness, and grace. And so I could begin by asking you, what are you hungry for? What have you been taking in as nourishment? How is your heart? When in the past week did you extend mercy or forgiveness?

I was struck this week how once again these three beatitudes present values that do not align with the culture of that day, and surely do not align with ours. Oh, we are taught today that we are very hungry and very thirsty. However, the culture around us is not telling us that we are hungry and thirsty for God's righteousness. Instead we should feel hunger pains for financial security, physical protection, human affirmation and acknowledgement, a better house, a better car, a better 401K, a better body... and the list could go on. Then our culture goes on to try to sell us things and devices that are sure to meet our hunger pains. Just look at some advertisements and see how our culture is trying to convince us that we are so very hungry. And yet, after consuming all we can, we find ourselves still hungry, still thirsty, still empty.

And blessed are the merciful? Our culture does not celebrate mercy. Instead our culture thrives on tit for tat. You hurt me. I have the right to hurt you. You have wronged me. I can turn

my back on you. Our culture bleeds with examples of broken relationships between people, within families, between an individual and a company, between groups of people. We are taught to look outward beginning with a state of distrust, and encouragement to watch out for ourselves and our interests. And yet today we hear Jesus say, Blessed are the merciful. This type of mercy models the forgiveness found in the Lord's Prayer.

Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the ones with a steadfast vision that remains clear and focused on God. The language is drawn from the Psalms and is in the context of asking who is ready to seek God in the temple, who is ready to come and bless God in worship? This speaks of integrity and a dedication to God and the ways of God. It speaks of one God and of God's kingdom. Again, not a message from our current culture. This beatitude speaks of a dependence upon God, and recognition that our strength and focus is found beyond ourselves in the God who created us.

The message of our culture is that you can have what you want, when you want it, no matter if it is good or bad for you. Oh, and don't let anyone tell you what is good for you, only you can make the decision. Dig deep, find your resolve, and keep pressing on. With your own strength, your own brains, your own tenacity you will find a way. Nope. Our culture does not teach us to claim our brokenness and that we are dependent upon God.

The beatitudes describe a different culture, a different kingdom, a different community. The beatitudes describes the values and practices of this new culture, kingdom, and community. The beatitudes create a new identity for a new clustering of people. The beatitudes don't promise that this new community will always get it right. In fact, one could even argue that within the beatitudes we see that Jesus knew that we would need these reminders on how to do life together in the body of Christ.

We at Waterford Mennonite Church strive to be a community who welcomes everyone to faith and fellowship in Jesus Christ, minister to the needs of one another and our neighbors through the Holy Spirit, and call out each other's gifts for the joyful work of God's reconciling mission. On our best days we strive to live up to our potential and our hopes. On our worst days pain, division, and apathy become our companions.

Jesus is delivering these words to the community with instructions on how they are to be in relationship with each other. The church is hard work. Relationships are messy. Relationships take time, and energy, intentionality, and mutual forgiveness. Relationships can be the source of great delight and the source of utter agony. Sometimes the church, the community, is a place where healing is realized. Sometimes the church, the community, is the place where wounds are inflicted. Don't you ever wonder if maybe it would just be easier to love Jesus on your own and not bother with any sort of faith community? I mean, if it's just me, chances are I won't need to worry about a church split, a church scandal, or a church or its members letting me down.

And yet, in a way that *transcends human understanding*. In a way that speaks of the *mystery of the Spirit*. We need each other. To catch a glimpse of the fullness of God's kingdom we need to combine our vision. To reach our potential to be agents of peace and healing we need to stand united. To not conform to the patterns of this world we need each other to remind us our identity and to which kingdom we belong. To be a community of the beatitudes, a community of blessing, we need to gather together, in the midst of our brokenness, to uplift our shared mission as we freely and abundantly give out blessings to each other.

I love how Marlene Kropf and Eddy Hall describe how we need each other in the faith community. In their book "Praying with the Anabaptists" they describe it this way:

Wouldn't it be nice, we may wonder, if we could just enjoy God without having to bother with all the brothers and sisters in God's family? But God doesn't give us that

option. To enter into relationship with God is to join the family of God, which includes people hard to get along with, people whose politics annoy us, people whose customs baffle us, and people whose words or actions embarrass us. How can God possibly expect us to relate meaningfully with people with whom we have nothing in common expect our faith in God?

Well, that is not only the mystery of Christian community but also its genius. Christian community doesn't depend on human affinity of any stripe – cultural, political, or doctrinal. God's life flowing through us... this and nothing else makes us one in Christ. While I must stretch to include those with whom I would not naturally choose to associate, I also take comfort in knowing that others will stretch to include me. When I am hard to get along with, I have brothers and sisters who will not desert me. When my views seem strange or wrongheaded, they will still love me. When I make choices that leave them shaking their heads, they will not disown me. We are bound together by something that runs deeper than our likes and dislikes, our similarities and dissimilarities, our agreements and disagreements. We are joined by a reality that empowers us to transcend our differences enough to truly love one another. The Christian community does not always live up to this high calling, it's true. Yet it is only here that we can ever find a fully satisfying and lasting answer to our own hunger to be safe, understood, and cared for – in the shared life created by the divine life we share.ⁱ Amen.

As members of this community we are called to remind each other that you are blessed. That you are a beloved child of God. To bless another means that we look them in the eye and honor their belovedness. It means “conveying to each other ours and God's promises of regard, presence, accompaniment and, above all, worth.”ⁱⁱ It means speaking into each other's lives, speaking into being the promise that you are worthy of blessing as one created in the image of God. It means that we allow ourselves to be vulnerable with our brokenness as we gently hold others in their own brokenness.

(I will move down to Communion table) As we were planning this series we realized that one powerful, tangible way we live out blessing each other happens every time we gather together around the Communion table. There we are reminded that Jesus was blessed, broken, and given for each of us. There we are reminded that as we follow Jesus we too are blessed, broken, and given to each other and to God's beloved world.

Every time we eat the bread and drink the cup we experience both vertical and horizontal relationships. Vertical as each one of us claims our own blessedness in Christ, and horizontal as we gather around the table and claim the blessedness of the ones beside us.

When we receive Communion, how often do we really see who we are breaking bread with? How often as we embrace the bread and the juice do we look across the table and declare to our sister or brother - "You are part of me, and I am part of you. Together we become the body of Christ. I need you, you need me, and in an act of grace and mystery we are joined as one as we are hosted by Jesus."

The Beatitudes call us to a different way of living, loving, and relating, as does the Communion table. Here we are all welcomed and stand as equals before God. Here forgiven sinners embrace other sinners and forgive those who have sinned against them. Here the walls our culture tries to erect based on our differences are torn down and we stand as a community, before the God that unites us all.

Here at the table we take the bread that is broken for us and are reminded of our brokenness and our blessedness even as we then turn and share the broken bread with those beside us, reminding them of their blessedness. Sometimes friends I will need reminded that I am the beloved child of God. Sometimes it will be you who needs reminded that they are the

beloved child of God. It is here within the body of Christ that we pour out blessings on each other.

This morning we will be receiving Communion around tables. There are two tables in the front, and one in the back. All are invited to the table. At Waterford it is our practice that those who have made the decision to follow Jesus and have experienced the waters of baptism are invited to receive the bread and the juice. However, also at Waterford we believe that faith exploration and discovery are a journey. Therefore we want to also recognize and create a place for those in our midst who have not yet made this decision, whether due to being a child, or to one still searching and seeking along the path. If this describes your journey, please know that you are welcome at God's table this morning. There are grapes at each table that represent a faith in development. Simply place your hands together (make a praying hands motion) and then grapes will be offered to you.

At the Lord's Table we are also invited to bless each other. So today we will first pass the basket of bread to each other and I ask that you bless each other by saying, "You are a beloved child of God." You will take your piece of bread, and then turn and offer the bread or the grapes to the one beside you, offering a blessing to them – You are a beloved child of God.

All will hold the bread or grapes, and then next we will pass around chalice of juice. Once again blessing each other by simply saying, "God bless you." Then you may dip your bread into the juice and then eat before turning to the one beside you and offering the juice and sharing the blessing, God bless you. If your neighbor holds a grape please bless them, "God bless you", and then they too may eat the grape before offering the juice and a blessing to their neighbor.

As we gather around the table may we really see who we are breaking bread with. Look across the table into the eyes of one older, or younger, or of a different gender. Look into the

eyes of one whose journey has not looked like yours. Look into the eyes of one for whom you know you disagree with on a matter. Look into the eyes of one who have known your entire life, or one you have just met this morning. Allow the Divine spark within you to recognize the Divine Spark in the other. Claim your blessedness and the blessedness of the one beside you. Look into the eyes of another and speak into being the promise, the blessing, the hope – “You are a beloved child of God.” Just as you are. No more. No less. “You are a beloved child of God. God bless you.”

At this time I would invite the servers to please come and join me at that table -
(Tim/Becky/Mary Ann/John Z. in first service and Jason/Loanne/Don/John Z. in second service).

Together we remember. On the night he was betrayed Jesus took the bread, and after blessing it, he broke it and said “This is my body, which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after the meal he took the cup and said “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood; whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes again.

Let us pray:

(Share elements with Communion Servers)

This morning I will remain at this table while Tim and Becky (Jason and Loanne) serve as hosts at the other two tables. If you are unable to come to a table please signal to one of our ushers and Mary Ann (Don) will bring the elements to you. As is our practice, all of the bread is gluten-free.

As the music plays all are invited to one of the tables, to be blessed and to bless others as we receive from the one broken for us.

ⁱ Marlene Kropf & Eddy Hall, *Praying with the Anabaptist: The Secret of Bearing Fruit* (Faith and Life Press: Newton, Kansas), 71-72.

ⁱⁱ David Lose, “On Beatitudes and Blessings,” <https://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=3020>.