

Matthew 5:3-5

Is This for Me?

Katie Misz: August 25, 2019

Do you need a blessing today?

The first time I went to Durham Mennonite church I remember thinking I felt tired. I wasn't sure I was up to going to church. I had just moved to North Carolina and I was feeling very sick, both physically and mentally. But my husband JE and I went anyways. We walked into this tiny church. The first person we met was a very old man, who handed us a bulletin. Tom, said a nametag stuck to his shirt. Tom gave us a giant toothless grin and shook our hands. Tom had intellectual disabilities and Tom was not able to communicate verbally....but he grinned with welcome with that big toothless smile. While he didn't answer our questions or tell us about the church, he joyfully led us to the sanctuary where a couple dozen people sat.

We went in and the worship leader stood up to lead. She asked the community to share prayer requests and a microphone was passed around to various members. She was quite hard of hearing and after every single request she asked for it to be repeated loudly and clearly. People shared and shared and shared. They shared of their struggles with mental illness. Caretakers and the elderly shared about the struggles of aging. People of minority shared the struggles they had at work or school, or just fear of driving down the road. People with addiction opened up with confession. A homeless man off the street came and joined in and shared gratitude for God's care. The whole ordeal took a while but we eventually prayed together and sang some songs. The hymns were a Capella and, once or twice, the song leader had to stop and start us over again because we sometimes got lost. But we picked it back up and made it through. Then the worship leader got back up and announced there would not be a sermon today, but some extended time of fellowship and to enjoy one another. We spent awhile talking to people and then we left, with absolutely no idea who the pastor of the church was.

But as we left that tiny little church, we both had tears in our eyes. I looked at JE and said, "I think we just got a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven." It was a beautiful mess that day. And they had room for my mess.

And Durham Mennonite was a home to us at a time we needed it. We were entirely accepted as we were.

I often find that the Kingdom shows up in moments of need. And it is such a blessing.

So I ask you, Do you need a blessing today?

Jesus gives blessings for people who need a blessing.

For people whose lives are a mess.

The people listening to Jesus on the side of the mountain may have never had a blessing before. They did not look like the "accomplished" or the "blessed" ones.

In Jesus' context, a blessing was a giving of honor. In an honor-shame culture, this is a big deal!

Jesus starts to speak and share about his Kingdom, and he opens with this line, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God."

The Greek word for poor depicts one who is economically very poor. It depicts a beggar, one who is crouched over or bowed low in shame.

Dependent on others for economic help. And also poor in spirit. They are dependent spiritually on God.

The ones who are poor cannot hide their neediness. And Jesus thinks this interdependence is a leadership skill for his kingdom.

Then Jesus continues, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Tears are allowed in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus does not ask his people to hide their pain, or pretend they are strong. Those who mourn are dependent on others and dependent on God to sustain them each day.

People honored in Jesus' kingdom are emotionally messy. They are no stranger to depression. They have known the cry of the Psalms, "My tears have been my food day and night." The ones who weep and mourn and wail and lament find comfort in Jesus' kingdom.

The third group honored in Jesus' kingdom are the meek.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."

The "meek" in Jesus' day were the lowly, the gentle, the powerless. The one who does not own land or hold position. Perhaps in our world today, the meek are the ones with disabilities. The ones who cannot be self-sufficient and thus live in this world with gentleness. Or perhaps the meek are the ones who are too old or too young to be self-sufficient. They are dependent on others and dependent on God day to day.

Jesus calls the meek the children of God. The special ones who receive inheritance - The landowners of His estate who will hold the power and security - The promised ones of the Kingdom of heaven.

One does not choose to be in these three groups of neediness. One simply finds oneself in positions of poverty, mournfulness, and meekness.

But these three groups are highlighted because Jesus call them out as potential **leaders** in the kingdom. These three groups are uniquely positioned to depend on God in a powerful way. And this dependence is a ministry. It is a gift. In honoring the poor, the mournful, and the meek, Jesus calls all of us to recognize our entire dependence on God. We need Jesus. We need each other. We need the kingdom of heaven. We need God like we need air in our lungs.

Do you need a blessing today?

It is not easy to be needy. It is much easier to be strong. Self-sufficient. And independent. But self-sufficiency is not the goal of Jesus' kingdom. Paul says that when we are weak, that is when we are strong.

I tell you of a time when I did not realize I needed a blessing. I was not aware of my weakness.

My youth group went on a trip to Brazil when I was in high school. And it was a learning trip for me. I remember thinking that I was going to change the world. I would bring Jesus to Brazil. I would be the one to bless others. Well, I had the chance to stay in a host home. The woman I stayed with lived in poverty - her floor was dirt, her bathroom was an outhouse. Her entire house was the size of my bedroom at home. And 5 of us slept there that night. I remember coming into her home with my giant suitcase, which had everything I thought I needed for that two week trip. And we spent an embarrassingly long amount of time trying to find a place for the suitcase to be stored in her home. And I quickly realized that my possessions in my suitcase amounted to more than her entire life's worth of possessions. But she was gracious. She showered me with words of blessing and of care, telling me stories of how God had always provided enough food for her to eat, even when she didn't know where she would find food and they had run out of money. And she always had just enough work to provide for her daughter to go to school. She was poor in spirit. She was meek. And she held the keys to the kingdom. She told me over and over how I was loved by God more than I'd ever know, and on the last day of hosting me, she went through her little box of jewelry, and shared with me her only bracelet, so I could take it home and remember her.

In her poverty, she chose a spiritual dependence on God that was incredible. And it made me realize my own need for God. That all the stuff in my suitcase could not substitute the precious treasured faith that she possessed.

And I wanted what she had.

It messed me up in the best way. I wanted to give stuff away. I wanted to live with less so I could have more of Jesus. I wanted others to be lifted up. I wanted to encounter people different from me, who understood the secrets of the kingdom. This began my journey of becoming much more aware of my own need and my own mess.

The blessings of the kingdom are not earned. You cannot think your way into God's kingdom. You cannot be good enough. You cannot be strong enough. The honors of the kingdom are not given to those we would expect. Blessings require a level of humility that says, "God, I need you. I cannot do this life alone anymore."

So I ask you today,

Do you need a blessing?

Are these blessings for you? Does your life depend on it?

There is room for your mess here. We, Waterford, are a beautiful mess.

Today we invite you to receive a blessing if you need one.

The pastor team will be up front ready to offer you a blessing and will say the words of the Beatitude blessings over you.

And then you can take one of the blessing cards on the way back to your seat, to remember this blessing is for you.