

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Blessed Are You

Based on Matthew 5:1-12

Paraphrased as #624 (Book of Praise)

For those of you who grew up in a Sunday morning, church-going kind of household, "The Blesseds" were one those things you memorized as part of what was considered proper in a Presbyterian Sunday School classroom, along with John 3:16 (God so loved the world...), the Lord's Prayer (debtors, of course) and the Ten Commandments (which needs no further explanation). For many, the words contained on the Sermon on the Mount continue to be a touchstone to their faith; words to fall back on when life is a bit rough; a reminder of the steadfastness of scripture in all of our days. I appreciate its gentle way of teaching and have found the words soothing to the church-ed and un-church-ed alike, at times of struggle and grief.

The reality is that each of the verses beginning with the word "Blessed" could be a sermon unto itself. But today, without tampering with the meaning that these short

verses have for you, I would like to draw your attention to the word: 'fortunate'.

Some versions of the Bible translate the word 'blessed' as 'happy'.

*Blessed [Happy] are the poor
in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of
heaven. (v3)*

But another meaning of the word 'blessed' can be the word 'fortunate.'

*"Fortunate are those who
mourn, for they will be
comforted." (v4)*

Fortunate? How can being wrapped up in the tendrils of grief be fortunate? How can being persecuted be a 'fortunate' place to find one's self? How can being insulted and ridiculed for our faith make us 'fortunate'?

Ah, but perhaps we are on to something. You have heard

the phrase, "Before you judge a man [or woman], walk a mile in their shoes." Who better to understand the worm-hole experience of grief, than one who has travelled through it? Who better to understand poverty, than one who has had no food in the cupboard? Who better to understand despair and doubt, than one who has travelled to the depths of hell and back in their heart, and is still here to tell their story?

It is not fortunate that life came upon us in difficult ways, from time to time. But it is fortunate when we learn from the experience. Because then, we can see its signs in people's eyes, we can say the words that are helpful and meaningful at those most critical moments, we are willing to become vulnerable in order to share wisdom, build courage and encourage another. The writer of Matthew was correct. Thank God we have had our own share of troubles through the years, so that we can better understand and help those who are in trouble now. We are stronger believers because of it. We are a stronger church because of it. And we can make a stronger community because of it.

"To you, the people of my world, "the Saviour says, "settle yourselves to a quiet place within. There are others who know this place as well. It is a place of sadness and joy. It is a place of regret, but also a place of kindness and goodness. In

this place within, you will find communion with Me, and with others who have lived and are living with the same struggles and successes as you are. It is a fortunate thing that life has been a bit of a mess for a bit, because it has brought you 'here'.

Rejoice and be glad.
Blessed are you. Holy are you.
Rejoice and be glad!
Yours is the Kingdom of God.
~#624 "Blest are They"
(Book of Praise)