

## **Matthew 5:1-12**

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.'

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Oskar Schindler was a German industrialist and a member of the Nazi Party during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. He was credited with saving the lives of 1,200 Jewish people during the Holocaust by employing them in his ammunitions factories, which were located in occupied Poland and Bohemia and Moravia. He was the subject of the 1993 film "Schindler's List".

There is a scene in the movie that ties into today's reading about the Beatitudes. In the movie Amon Goth is the commander of a German death camp. He was a violent sociopath, prone to killing Jewish prisoners indiscriminately. He believed that his ability to kill was the very essence of power.

Schindler somehow worked his way into Goth's good graces. One evening, Schindler challenged his beliefs about power. He argued that the ability to kill isn't power; rather,

the ability to have mercy is power. Schindler said: “The Emperor was the most powerful person in Rome. Anyone could kill, but only the Emperor could pardon a convicted criminal out of mercy.

So Goth gave mercy a try and pardoned a few people who had annoyed him. It felt good, but he couldn’t pull it off for long and eventually returned to his brutal ways. He found that exercising mercy was not who he was. Rather, his default was violence and exercising violence is when he felt most comfortable.

I thought of this scene in relation to the Beatitudes because we commonly view them as a kind of moral check list, rather than seeing them as who Jesus is calling us to be. We look at them as behaviors rather than an internal disposition and a reflection of who we are.

In the beatitudes, Jesus is inviting into the kingdom of God. He draws a contrast between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. He challenges our often unconscious allegiance to the Kingdom of the world.

It is important to notice that the people who Jesus called “blessed” were definitely **not** seen as blessed by other people, nor are they seen as blessed by most people today in our culture. Those who are mourning rather than happy are blessed? Those who are meek rather than strong are blessed? Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness rather than wealth are blessed? Such thinking was absurd to Jesus’ contemporaries and is absurd for us today.

In the beatitudes Jesus has something else much deeper in mind. He is challenging our very understanding of blessedness itself and, by extension, challenging our culture’s view and understanding of who is considered blessed by God. He turns our culture’s values upside down.

Part of what we do when we celebrate All Saints' Day is to participate in the inversion of the kingdom of the world which believes that all we can see, hold, control, or buy is all there is.

When we commend those who have died to God's care, we proclaim that God's kingdom is not some distant thing or place but exists now. It exerts its influence on us now and calls us to a new identity on this side of the grave.

All Saints' Day is a repetition and rehearsal of the Easter promise that there is something more, something that transcends our immediate experience, and this proclamation is rooted in the confidence that God's love and life are more powerful and enduring than the hate, disappointment, and death that seems at times to surround us.

Which brings us back to *Schindler's List*. It shows that exercising mercy is not an isolated act. Rather, mercy erupts from who we are deep in our souls. In Christ our inner lives have been transformed and we have taken on a new identity.

But it's not easy. Returning hate for hate, condemning those who do not conform to our expectations, and exercising violence against those who will not yield to us, seems so wide spread that they are believed to be the only possibilities.

Yet, each Sunday we gather around Jesus who was considered a loser and tragic victim, rejected by prominent leaders and executed by the powerful. But, God raised him from the dead and validated his values which are found in the beatitudes.

The beatitudes are not about a new morality as much as they are about God manifesting himself in our lives.

Instead of blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. One could say "God is with the poor in spirit and theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

God is with those who mourn and they will be comforted.

God is with the meek and they will inherit the earth.

God is with those who hunger and thirst for righteousness and they will be filled.

God is with the merciful and they will receive mercy.

God is with the pure in heart and they will see God.

God is with the peacemakers and they will be called children of God.

If you want to receive mercy, give mercy. If you want to be filled, then hunger and thirst for righteousness. If you want to be called a child of God, then be a peacemaker. If you want to be comforted, don't be afraid to mourn. If you want to be enchanted by the beauty of the earth, then be meek rather than proud.

Light candles.      Funeral planning form handout.