

“Upside Down Blessings”
Micah 6:1-8, Matthew 5:1-12
February 2, 2020
Rerun of January 30, 2005

Before Micah reading:

The closing of this reading contains words familiar to many of us...the answer to the question “What does the Lord require of us?” The lead up to this answer is sort of a back and forth between the people and God...an on-going controversy...or frustration...the people are struggling to know what God wants of them and God is frustrated they don’t get it. So, God gives it to them simply, answers their question. Listen.

Before Matthew:

A large crowd had gathered as he began to teach them. Holy imagine you are there on the hillside, a part of that crowd desperately needing to hear some good news. They lived under the auspices of an oppressive regime...you know oppressive. You hear Jesus say there is something else in this world of power games and violence and grief; something that matters, something scared, something good. Even though he speaks to the whole crowd, each word seems to open another closed place in your soul. Jesus knows all these feelings we each have. I don’t know how, but he does. He doesn’t just hope those who mourn will be comforted, he knows it. When he finishes speaking, his words still hang in the air, and they carry me/you home in a cloud of comfort, washing us with the rain/reign of something new---hope.

If he spoke today, to a crowd on a hill...in a church, around a table, at a meeting, in a classroom...perhaps he would say it like this...

When you come to the end of your rope,
when you realize you can’t do everything
you want to do or be everything you
think you should be/could be,

when you face your choices/your sins
and know you need help to do something
about it

...it is still possible to live the blessed
life, the life of righteousness in harmony
with God. It is easier than you think and
some of you are already doing it.

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Welcome to the topsy-turvey world of  
the kingdom of God, where many of the  
traditional markers we associate with a  
blessed and happy life are turned upside  
down. The blessings seem to be upside  
down!

Success, knowledge, security, self-  
confidence, give way to humility,  
hunger, grief, and persecution. It seems  
these are the real blessing of life. Upside  
down!

Does God want us to be meek and poor  
in spirit? Does our suffering please God?  
How can Jesus actually say, “Happy are  
those who mourn”? Is this what the Lord  
requires?

What does it mean to be a successful,  
blessed human being?

We live in a consumerist culture which  
assaults us daily with the message that  
we are just one new car or ten pounds or  
one report card or one all-expense paid  
trip to Tahiti away from true happiness.

We may pay lip service on Sunday to the idea of being meek, poor in spirit, or pure of heart, but come Monday when we are back in the office, on the road, or in the classroom, we know we will not be rewarded and valued for our humble piety, but for what we accomplish, discover, produce.

Many of us have succumbed to the gospel of progress...rather than the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have this sense that if we try harder, work faster, or spend more money (or less money), we will finally find the happiness we have been promised. And, the more we chase after happiness, the faster it eludes us.

We live in a culture that worships academic/business knowledge and achievement, and the satisfaction we feel when we achieve a long-awaited goal is quickly diminished and replaced by the desire/pressure to accomplish again and more...and we set out for the next goal. We didn't hear God say at our baptisms...in you I am delighted...no reason to seek to please me by being more than you are.

I think what Jesus is trying to say is happiness is not something we will one day find, somewhere out there...if we just look hard enough, try hard enough, be good enough. A state of blessedness is not something we will achieve if we just work longer or harder...trying to get it right...or look as if we've got it all "right".

Happiness/wholeness isn't hidden somewhere out in the world, but rather somewhere deep in our heart.

Blessed is something we simply are by virtue of the fact we are human beings alive!

**Whether we are rich or poor, rejoicing or mourning, hungry or filled to the brim with things to share...whether we have our usual Easter Brunch or an Easter Coffee, have 10 people in worship or a thousand, give all we can or hardly give at all...whether our kids do their homework or not, the bills are mounting or not, your boss is demanding or not, you are criticized or not, abused or not, helped or not, a success or not...**

**You are a child of God...and as God's children, whether we realize it or not, we are blessed!**

**But if you realize it...it will set you free!** Free...not to do what you want...that's not what freedom means. Free...

As a child of God, no matter what the day looks like, life feels like, the world seems like...you are blessed...free to **do** what you are called to **be**...

**You are free to DO justice. You are free to LOVE kindness. And you are free to WALK HUMBLY with your God!**