

Blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers

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I. Lord, may we also have mercy!

Et misere cordia...His mercy continues....this is a phrase in Bach's

Magnificat that Hank and I will sing with an orchestra at St. Mary's in

November. The Latin, "Et misere cordia"-His mercy, "cordia" continues.

We have to start with God and HIS mercy to us when we consider "Blessed

are the merciful". We are who we are because of God's mercy. Romans 5: 6-

8 says that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. This is how God

proved his love for us! Nothing motivates me more to forgive others than

realizing that I have been forgiven by a merciful God. When I go to God in

prayer at any time of the day, one of the phrases I repeatedly use is "Lord

Jesus Christ, song of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

Our current postmodern culture *admires* mercy, sometimes *expects* it,

perhaps because of today's almost instant release of stories of mercy. This

was not so in Jesus' day. In fact, both the Romans and the Greeks saw "pity"

or "mercy" as a decided weakness, *not* a strength. That's why Jesus, when

he said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall find mercy" was so radical

and upside-down!

According to , the New Testament teaches consistently that *only* the merciful shall receive mercy *in the Kingdom*. Jesus tells a story of the unforgiving servant and at the end of the story (Matt. 18:21-35) he condemns any person who is like the unforgiving, unmerciful servant. Also in Matthew, remember how Jesus said that God will forgive our debts *as we forgive our debtors*. Twice in this same gospel of Matthew, Jesus quotes Hosea, which calls for mercy rather than sacrifice. We cannot claim to be merciful if we are unmerciful towards others' sins. Matthew records this gospel in Greek, even though Jesus had spoken Aramaic, which used much Hebrew and Hebraic rooted words.

The word “mercy”, translated from Greek is *ellemones*, means “to be moved from sympathy into action”. It refers to not an attitude, but to deeds of mercy- concrete acts. “I feel your pain”- our pat reply which has come to mean the opposite of mercy in our current culture. is a curt and succinct way of saying, “Too bad—you lose.” Getting inside another person’s skin and experience, seeing things from their perspective and then proceeding to help to relieve hardship is the meaning of this Greek word, *ellemones*. *Merciful*. Jesus, speaking Aramaic, would probably have spoken the Hebrew word

“chesed”, meaning to deliberately use our wills to sympathize with another’s plight.

Some criminals who have been shown mercy- then have the capacity to show mercy in their own lives to others. It is a cycle started by kindness shown to the one who is down-and-out. But in Christ’s kingdom, He not only shows us mercy, but also expects us to keep the cycle going- to show others in our lives, in the world, this same mercy.

To whom do you need to extend mercy? Perhaps it is to yourself! Being merciful to myself was something I had to learn, since I was very unforgiving of myself and my mistakes, growing up. I remember playing a Mendelssohn piece in front of a piano judge once at Hiram college and running out afterwards, so that I could find a private place to cry and review all the mistakes I had made. Sometimes we need to start with ourselves in extending mercy, but often it is on the undeserving. Peter Kreeft, in *Back to Virtue*, says “There are no “good people”, and the best of us say so the most clearly. Saints agree they are sinners; only sinners think they are saints. Only fools demand justice, for where would we be if we got it? No, mercy is our only hope from God, and our neighbors’ only hope from us as well.”

II. *Heart-cleaners*

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” What is purity of heart? Well, if we go straight to Jesus for the answer, I think we could find it in Matthew 22: 37 where he says: Love the Lord your God with all your heart.” Not just part of your heart or with a divided heart, but with all of your heart, made clean with repentance, washed with a clear conscience. James, in chapter 4:8, talks about our drawing nigh to God with clean hearts, purified and not double-minded “and He will draw near to you.” In this case of having a pure heart, we have to make the move to ask for a heart-cleaning. God is more than willing to give us a clean heart, but we have to take it to the Cleaners—daily.

Psalm 24:3-4 is said to be the OT parallel to this beatitude: *Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts, who do not lift up their souls to what is false, and do not swear deceitfully.* King David cried out to God in Psalm 51: 10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Purity in heart is found only in Jesus Christ!

Do you desire a rebirth in Christ, a heart that is humble and cleansed before God? This is not just a question to ask a young person deciding to be a Christian. Rather, it is one we ask ourselves daily. It is said that this Beatitude destroys hypocrisy. The pure in heart will see God. The highest joy of a Christian is God's promise to be with us face-to-face in the beauty of His holiness. To be pure in heart is to have full allegiance to God alone, to give the very best part of yourself, your life, your energy to God for His glory and His Kingdom.

One of my favorite Christmas carols "In the Bleak Midwinter" is a setting of Christina Rossetti's poem:

What can I give him? Poor that I am.
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb.
If I were a wiseman, I would do my part,
Yet what can I give him—
Give my heart.

III. Children of God make peace.

Blessed are the Peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.

This could easily be a sermon series in itself- There are different kinds of peace, there is the theology behind our peace and pacifism position, there are

different applications to peace as defined by the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. For today, I'd like to talk about the definition of a peacemaker. A peacemaker is not a peace breaker nor is he a peacefaker. FIGHT, FREEZE, FLIGHT- the three choices one has in a conflict. Mennonite need to learn how to "fight" lovingly. Peacemakers are persons who stay to work through a conflict: handling conflict as an opportunity for growth without fighting back or running away. Ken Sande, prolific writer and speaker on peace and reconciliation (and no, he is not a Mennonite!), writes that there are four practical purposes to remember in the midst of life's conflicts on a personal level:

1. **Glorify God in the conflict.** Did you ever think about how you could live out your faith in a fight by refusing to join in on the name-calling or the escalation, by either countering with a positive or using I-messages to bring the other person to a more level emotional place?
2. **Get the log out of *your* eye.** (going back to purity of heart).
3. **Gently restore.** (that goes back to 'Blessed are the meek')
4. **Go and be reconciled.** (Further action is required if the initial conflict continues.)

To encapsulate this beatitude, we go the Hebrew word for peace- shalom.

Shalom- is more than the absence of strife- it is the presence of harmony and brother and sisterhood, the wholeness of relationship.

I sometimes sit and contemplate why we, as Anabaptists, have become sidetracked from the descriptions of being peaceful people that followed the 16th century believers. What has kept us from being the upside-down radicals whose Kingdom is not of this world? And why do we choose to focus on exclusiveness rather than becoming peace doctors: people who are *skilled* peacemakers? There are peacemaking conferences, which have myriads of workshops on making peace. Why aren't these advertised and attended by Mennonites? If we preach unity in love, then we need to again become known as the people of God's peace, surrendered to the God of peace. No one is ever converted by violence or by demands.

I challenge you to hold these Beatitudes in your memories. Memorize them. Say them. As often as you take a drink of water during the day, say the Beatitudes until you can say them by memory. They say that the mature people who memorize poetry, scripture, whatever...use parts of their brains

that help keep them sharp and free of Alzheimer's....but the main reason we memorize them is so that we can **live them** when required.

Blessed are the poor in spirit....for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn....for they shall be comforted.

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

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled

Blessed are the merciful...for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart....for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers...for they shall be called children of God.