Hi,

I think it is Saturday . . . there’s a sameness to the days. The rhythms of our lives may have changed but Jesus is still Lord and we remain his people.

* On-line worship is ready: 5:30 tonight, 9:30 & 11:00 tomorrow. You’ll probably find the smoothest streaming experience at St. Andrew’s [Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/StAndrewUnitedMethodistChurch/) (no account needed, just follow the link)
* My Monday and Tuesday classes will be on-line again on [my own Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle). Again, no account needed, just follow the link. But you will need an account to comment. If you and I are not friends on Facebook, just send me a friend request and we will be. We will study Matthew on Monday at 3pm and Genesis on Tuesday at 11:45.
* Don’t forget, links to the on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/).
* The third Elijah study is attached -- it is Super Bowl time!

Last week, in my first ever on-line class, we talked about the beatitudes that begin Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Here are some reflections on these well-known verses.

***Matthew 5:3-16(NRSV)***

**3“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**4“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.**

**5“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

**6“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.**

**7“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.**

**8“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

**9“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.**

**10“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.**

**11“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.**

Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is not a new and more stringent system of rules nor is it an impossible ideal. Rather, when Jesus sits down to teach his followers, he is training them in the Kingdom of God. These nine beatitudes, with which Jesus begins his teaching, are not simply an introduction to what follows – they are its very foundation. These are not “entrance requirements” to God’s Kingdom. They are not conditional – none of them say “if you will x, then y.” These are straightforward declarative statements of what is. Indeed, Eugene Boring goes further. He notes that the Beatitudes do not merely declare what it is; they bring it into being – much like an umpire crying out “strike” or a minister pronouncing a couple man and wife. The Beatitudes are Gospel – they proclaim to the world the Good News! Because these are prophetic pronouncements, they point us toward the teacher. They are not self-evident. It is Jesus’ authority that makes the Beatitudes the foundation of the Sermon.

*What is a beatitude?*

The Sermon on the Mount is not the only place we find beatitudes in the Bible. For example, Psalm 1 begins “Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked.” This is a beatitude. Many more are in Revelation: 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; and 22:14!!

A beatitude is written so as to be a declarative statement of fact. It is not an opinion. It is not a command. (You English majors will know that a beatitude is written in the indicative mood!)

The first word of each beatitude in the Bible seems to pose a problem for translators. In Greek, the word is *makarios*. In the secular Greek world, it meant simply “happy” or “fortunate.” At times you find it translated this way, such as Psalm 1:1 in the NRSV. But in the religious context, “happy” is not the best choice; “blessed” is better, such as the NRSV translators used in Matthew.

This matters because a beatitude is centered on what God does, not some feeling on our part. It is God who blesses. The opposite of “blessed” is not “unhappy,” it is “cursed.” Our happiness comes from the many blessings God bestows upon us.

*The Kingdom of Heaven*

Each of the nine Beatitudes points us to God’s Kingdom (the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew). They either mention the kingdom directly (the first and eighth Beatitude) or to some aspect of it. In the kingdom of God, his people will be comforted and filled and shown mercy. They will inherit the earth. They will be rewarded in heaven. They will be called the children of God. They will see God! All the rest of the Sermon on the Mount has to be read in this bright light.

*For whom is the Kingdom of Heaven?*

The kingdom of heaven is for the people of God. The people of God are those who place their faith in Jesus Christ, in God. Those who have faith in Jesus strive to be ever-truer disciples. Those who are disciples of Christ strive to be Christ-like, much as an apprentice strives to be like the master. In the Beatitudes, Jesus teaches his followers about the characteristics of disciples. Again, this is about training for the kingdom! Here are some thoughts on each Beatitude.

* Those who are “poor in spirit” are those who know that they are dependent in God. As Boring puts it: “Persons who are pronounced blessed are not those who claim a robust ego and strong sense of self-worth, but those whose only identity and security is in God.”
* “Those who mourn” doesn’t refer only to the death of loved ones, but also to our lament for the condition of God’s creation and his people. In other words, those who strive for the kingdom of God realize how far short of God’s hope the present world falls.
* Like “poor in spirit,” meekness (meaning gentleness and humility) flies in the face of conventional wisdom about what it takes to be “successful.” Of course, Jesus also challenges us to reconsider what we mean by success. (see Psalm 37:9,11 also).
* “Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness” are those who long for the coming of God’s kingdom and the vindication of right. At the same time, we need to understand that Jesus brings comfort to those who are quite literally poor, hungry, and thirsty.
* Matthew chooses a Greek word for “mercy” that is not merely about having compassion for others – the merciful are those who *act* on their compassion.
* In v. 8, purity of heart goes beyond the avoidance of impure thoughts to a single-minded devotion to God.
* Many of Jesus’ followers expected him to call for the overthrow of the Roman oppressors, by force if necessary. But Jesus disappoints them. The people of the kingdom are people of peace. In God’s kingdom, swords are broken into plowshares.

Jesus knows that to the extent that his shaping his disciples moves them toward “Christ-likeness,” they will be increasingly out of step with the world around them. They will be reviled and persecuted as they shape their lives around the values of the kingdom. Jesus pronounces blessing on them and on their prophetic mission . . . our mission . . . to be the light to the world.

*No recommendations today -- five a week are about all I can do!*

‘til Monday, grace and peace,

Scott