

February 12, 2017  
Matthew 5:3-12  
Pastor Elizabeth Kelsey  
Creekside COB

### **“Blessed are the Placemakers”**

**You know what it’s like to be reading a book and suddenly be stopped by a misspelling. Most of the time you figure out what was meant and keep reading, because it isn’t a big deal. But in sources like science formulas or the scripture -- it can be serious. For example, some of the mistakes found in proofreading scripture include these:**

**Exodus 20 – “Thou shalt commit adultery.” (NOT commit)  
John 8:11 – “Go and sin on more.” (NO more)  
Mark 7:25 – “Let the children first be killed.” (be FILLED)  
Matt. 5:9 – “Blessed are the placemakers. (PEACEmakers)**

**And for the Monty Python fans, you probably remember the pun in *Life of Brian*, “Blessed are the cheesemakers.”<sup>1</sup>**

**When we read the Beatitudes, we might get the feeling it is full of typos. What can be positive about being the poor in spirit, or mourning or persecution? The “real life” translations Tim Randall read this morning might sound more plausible and practical.**

**When I was looking for a text to use for this second part of PB&J, I pulled up all the scriptures with the word blessed or blessing. Probably 90% were contrasts between blessing and cursing! What I chose to use were the familiar Psalm 103 used for our call to worship, and the Beatitudes -- both Old Testament and New. The Hebrew word for blessed is “baraKAH,” a blessing or grace flowing from one being to another from its divine source. The Greek word is “maKARios,” usually defined as blessed or happy.” But the Beatitudes are not**

---

<sup>1</sup> “Blessed are the placemakers.”

talking about human feelings. The source of blessing is from God; God bestows blessing on us, his children. Blessing is also something we give back to God, as in Psalm 103, “Bless the Lord, O my soul.” God blesses us, we bless others, others bless us, and together we all bless God. It’s a circular flow that can go either direction and is meant to keep moving on. To be blessed is something we all yearn for, whether we know it or not.

In the Beatitudes, Jesus is basically talking to his disciples, although a crowd of people are listening in. He says to the disciples, “You are blessed because you are experiencing the coming of God’s kingdom. These are the attitudes for those who a promised a place in God’s kingdom -- the poor in spirit, the merciful, those who mourn, the pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for God, who are persecuted for God’s sake. One author says, “The blessing of God will come to all who make a place for the kingdom in their lives.”<sup>2</sup> Or as Earl Palmer says in *Feasting on the Word*, “You are on the right road when you are poor in spirit, or when you mourn, etc.”<sup>3</sup>

On the right road. So maybe “placemakers” is a good term, after all. These Beatitude terms are “kingdom-based qualities that can open the door to inner peace and everlasting salvation.”<sup>4</sup> Those who find their true identity and security in the One God will be rewarded -- the kingdom of God is theirs.

Rachel Naomi Remen wrote a book called *My Grandfather’s Blessings*. She tells the story of visiting her grandfather once a week after school. She and her grandfather had a special bond. His favorite name for her was Neshume-le -- meaning “beloved little one.” She could tell her grandfather anything -- her upsets, her mistakes, her accomplishments. Grandfather would fix a pot of tea, and together they put a cube of sugar between their teeth and drank the hot beverage through the sugar. Then her grandfather would close his eyes. After some silence, he would thank God for the lessons Neshume-le learned from her mistakes. He would appreciate how hard she worked to accomplish difficult tasks. And then he gave her

---

<sup>2</sup> “Blessed are the placemakers.”

<sup>3</sup> Earl F. Palmer, *Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary*, Westminster/John Knox Press, Year A, Volume 4, p. 238

<sup>4</sup> “Blessed are the placemakers.”

**a blessing and asked the long-ago women -- Sarah, Rachel, Leah -- to watch over her. When her grandfather died, Rachel grieved silently that no one was there to pray for her and give her a blessing.**

**When her mother was old and dying, Rachel shared with her about Grandfather's blessings and how she missed them. Her mother teared up and smiled sadly. "I have blessed you every day of your life, Rachel," she told her. "I just never had the wisdom to do it out loud."<sup>5</sup>**

**A friend of ours was so impressed by a book titled "The Gentle Art of Blessing," that he bought copies for many of his friends. The subtitle is "A simple practice that will transform you and your world." The practice is simple. Replace negative thoughts by positive affirmation.**

**The author, Pierre Pradervand, observed a shocking "eye for an eye" situation that shook him to his core. An acquaintance whose brother was killed during the war hunted down the person who killed him and did the same to the enemy. The author was literally sickened by this incident, knowing instinctively that "an eye for an eye" is not the way to live.**

**Pradervand was employed in international development in the Swiss school system. During that time he had to make one of the most difficult decisions of his career: to keep his job and accept a situation that violated professional ethics, or to quit. He quit. He learned later that the company was banking on his leaving. In the following weeks he developed a deep-seated and all-consuming resentment against the people who put him in this impossible situation. The resentment obsessed him day and night. Then one day he read the statement in Matthew 5:44: "Bless them that curse you." That's what he had to do. Bless his former "persecutors." He had to wish them fulfillment and happiness in every level of their being.<sup>6</sup>**

**At first, these blessing had to be a conscious decision, but slowly, the blessings moved from being an act of the will to a yearning of the heart. Then one day he realized he could bless everyone -- "people**

---

<sup>5</sup> Rachel Naomi Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessing: Stories of strength, refuge, and belonging*. Riverhead Books, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Pierre Pradervand, *The Gentle Art of Blessing*, Simon & Schuster, 2009, p. 1-2.

on the street, at the post office, in the line before him. This gentle art of blessing became a silent song. It was an effective way of staying spiritually centered and of freeing his thoughts from negativity, criticism and judgment.”<sup>7</sup>

Within all of us is that spark of God’s love, like the greeting “Namaste”-- “I acknowledge the divine in you.” The divine spark often gets buried beneath the frustrations or anger or pressure of everyday life. In blessing others, we are asking that that divine spark surface to the top so that they will be truly blessed.

Pradervand asks, “When is the last time you blessed someone? Who in your past might it help you to bless? Who in your present might it help you to bless? Could blessing help you live more fully in the present?”<sup>8</sup> Important questions to answer for ourselves.

While most blessings are just a silent prayer or hug or tone of voice, how sad it would be to realize at the end of life that you never told someone you love that you silently bless them every day but never thought, like Rachel Remen’s mother, to say it out loud. People need to hear those blessings.

Earl Palmer continues his comments on the Beatitudes. “Some of the nine have a haunting edge: What does it mean to be poor in spirit? Would I not rather be rich in spirit? Nevertheless, Jesus describes our awareness of being poor in spirit as [a sign of our discipleship, of being on the right road.] Each of the nine blessings calls for making a decision of attitude and faithfulness. The second part of each blessing contains a promise-- to be called children of God, or to see God, or given the kingdom of heaven!”<sup>9</sup>

One author divides these Beatitudes into triads. The poor in spirit, those who mourn, and the meek describe emptying ourselves for the sake of the kingdom. The pure in heart, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, and the merciful are the attributes that fill us. And the peacemakers, the persecuted, and the reviled are those who ultimately know joy. Matthew concludes the Beatitudes by saying,

---

<sup>7</sup> Pradervand, p 3.

<sup>8</sup> Pradervand, p.5.

<sup>9</sup> Earl F. Palmer, p. 240.

**“Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven.” Joy is proof we are on the right road.**

**There is something about *The Gentle Art of Blessing* and the Beatitudes that strike a similar cord. Jesus offers what appear to be self-destructive personal choices. To bless someone who curses you or wishes you harm is counter-intuitive. Yet Pierre Pradervand and my friend learned that blessing others changes attitudes -- if not for the other person, at least for you. Blessing brings joy, just as Jesus predicted!**

**Richard Kauffman reflects on the word “benediction.” It comes from two Latin words, *bene* and *dicere*, which mean to speak well of, to bless. Kauffman says, I have come to the conviction that we should offer one another “benedictions” not just in worship but in the course of daily living” . . . Kauffman adds, “I am getting into the habit of ending my pastoral care visits with people by looking into their eyes, grasping both their hands and saying: “May the peace of Christ be with you.” At first it sounds like a pious farewell, but then I observe a melting as they receive the words of blessing literally.”**