

St. Andrew's Sermons
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Seeing with God's Eyes

The crowds were growing. Jesus had just come on the scene, but already word was spreading. He had been healing the sick, casting out demons, but he hadn't said much. They didn't yet know his mind or heart, and he decided it was time they did.

So Jesus went up the side of a mountain. And that's important. He's following the footsteps of Moses, who climbed a mountain to receive the law that would bind together the people of Israel. In the same way, Jesus goes up the mountain, not to receive, though, but to give. With the crowd listening below, Jesus delivers his great sermon. We know it as the Sermon on the Mount, but you might think of it as his opening statement. It's his first and greatest teaching, his summary of the good news of God.

So what does he say? What is this sermon about? We only hear part of it today, but it begins with the Beatitudes, a series of unlikely blessings. I say unlikely because on the surface, they are almost cruel in their contradiction. Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are those who are persecuted.

But how can that be? It is no blessing to be poor, or to mourn. There is no joy in meekness and persecution. These blessings only make sense if they point to the future. And that's part of it; Jesus does promise reward in heaven. But the blessings are conveyed in the present tense, as if they apply immediately. Seems like small comfort to those in pain.

But what if we've lost something in translation? What if we're not quite understanding his intent? What if we made one change and replaced the word blessing with beloved? Beloved are the poor in spirit. Beloved are those who mourn. Beloved are the meek and those who hunger for righteousness. Beloved are the persecuted and the peacemakers and the merciful.

Well that changes things, because now it's not so much about what these people were feeling as it is a statement about the heart of God. I think that Jesus is explaining how God sees the world. He looks

at the crowd and he sees people who are poor and sorrowful. He sees people who are meek and hungry. He sees people who are persecuted and afraid. These are the vulnerable people of his society, and what does he do? He names them beloved. He claims them as God's own and offers blessing.

So that's it. That's his opening statement. That's his vision for the Kingdom of God. We know that because it's also his closing statement. This was Jesus' first teaching. His last teaching just before he's killed is Matthew 25 - the scenes in our stained glass windows. I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink, sick and you cared for me, naked and you clothed me, in prison and you visited me, a stranger and you welcomed me. It's the same vision. Seeking out the vulnerable. Embracing the outcast. Expanding the boundaries of love. From beginning to end, that's what the gospel is about.

So what does that mean for us? Have you ever been to a 3-D movie at the theater? You know, they give you those special glasses. If you try to watch without the glasses, it's fuzzy and confusing. You can't make out the picture. But when you put the glasses on, the characters are so real they jump right off the screen. That's what it's like to see with the eyes of God. To look at the world around us and see people who are hurting – to see them so clearly that we can't help but draw close and extend a hand. To see brokenness and respond with healing. To see despair and respond with hope. To see fear and respond with love.

It seems to me that our primary task as followers of Jesus is to put on those glasses, and to remember that it's not a movie. It's real life. Just as in Jesus' day, there are people all around us who are vulnerable. They're in our pews, our schools, our neighborhoods and communities. They need us to see with God's eyes. They need us to stand with them, to embrace them, and to call them beloved.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. I was hungry and you gave me food. Blessed are the meek. I was sick and you cared for me. Blessed are the persecuted. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. These are the bookends of the gospel. But when did we see you? they asked Jesus. When did we care for you? Truly, I tell you, he said, whenever you cared for one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you cared for me. Amen.