

Jonathan Mark
FMC Reedley
Matthew 5:1-12 & 1 Cor 1:18-31
1/29/2023

“Foolish Blessings”

Good morning Church. When I think about where I am currently in my faith journey, the animating question is, “who is Jesus” who is this 1st-century Jewish Messiah? What did he say to his followers in his time, and why should I care about what he has to say to me today? And I don’t know where you are on that journey. I’m sure some of you have some certainty. They know why they follow Jesus and why he is important. Others are sure about Christ but are looking to lean in deeper and learn new things about this mystery, Still, others may be committed to this community of fellow questioners, and others are still searching.

I wonder if that is how the crowd at the sermon on the mount felt. A crowd was full of disciples, doubters, and people looking for a reason to give into hope. People who are poor in spirit and feel persecuted are looking for someone to show them the way.

Please pray with me; may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you, our hope and example. Amen.

Who wants to follow Jesus?

In the modern day, a Christian might say to go to heaven or that Jesus was a great teacher. However, take yourself back into the mind of people who first heard rumors about Jesus. What business did crowds have flocking to this homeless Rabbi? What business did Corinthians have following an executed criminal?

The Beatitudes are God’s blessings. They are the foolishness of God, blessing things that are low and despised. I honestly do not like being poor in spirit, mourning, or meek. Sure I may want to be thirsty for justice, be merciful, and make peace, but the act of my thirsting and showing mercy shows that the world is out of whack. These blessings are not things I would voluntarily choose for myself. However, Jesus is not speaking to a privileged preacher; he is talking to people considered poor in spirit, hungering for righteousness, and the rest. He is speaking to prostitutes, tax collectors, sinners, disabled people, and other poor peasants under the boot of the Roman Empire and their collaborators. When I realized this, I understood these beatitudes are not only pretty poetry but Jesus proclaiming whose side he was on. The side of the weak, rejected, and despised.

And then, when I realized the Corinthians passage started to fall into place.

“not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.”

The early Christian movement was made up of a bunch of misfits. It was a movement that welcomed women into positions of power and welcomed in slaves, Jewish and gentiles from across the empire, from the core of Rome to the periphery of Jerusalem. [amazing that those very different groups got along]. But maybe they got along because they felt like they were individuals and groups that felt undervalued, poor in spirit, meek, and peacemakers in a culture of war.

The world saw Jesus as a failure. Christ is a loser. Just like them. So why follow Jesus? This persecuted messiah, lover of the losers?

Let me start by saying that it is fine not to be attracted to this idea of Jesus. Jesus is many things; he is king and peasant, shepherd and sheep, teacher and savior.

But what I love about Jesus of the losers is how it keeps the possibilities open. Jesus turns the world upside down, throwing out what was considered great and replacing it with the lowly. And that is a wonderfully flexible image.

Because we humans are always in the process of growing as individuals and societies, we hopefully grow in wisdom and knowledge. (Knowledge is not enough, right Dr. Gering). We grow in experiences, grow out of and into beliefs, and grow into and out of relationships with different people. I hope I look back at my life knowing I turned away from the faith of my youth into a more mature faith. Turned away from the wisdom of the world to the wisdom of God.

Or maybe you love this image because you have fallen in love with the God of liberation, who has a preferential option for the poor and works in solidarity with the dispossessed to bring justice to all humanity. Because if God blesses the most vulnerable among us, all will have enough. Consider a man who has more than enough bread and someone who has none. If God sided with both equally, then God would respect the ownership rights of the one with bread, leaving the other hungry. But if God were on the side of the hungry, God would ensure they both are filled. What’s that old tired saying? There is enough for everyone’s needs, not everyone’s greed.

Whatever the case, this poetry calls us to open our hearts and minds to the wisdom of God. That the way of this world can be turned upside down, and the wisdom of who is greatest according to human standards is thrown out the window in Christ Jesus. Amen to that.