

Throughout our world, throughout the Church, and likely in all our homes a common question is being asked. Is it possible to navigate the turbulent waters of life, and if so, how? People are looking for a way to deal with the challenges, the uncertainties, and the difficulties of life. We want some assurance that the direction of our life will offer meaning and connect us to something larger than our individual stories. In the midst of all the noise, the turmoil, the uncertainty, we ask how do we move forward? What are we to teach and tell our children and grandchildren? Those are the age-old questions, asked in every generation.

Our world currently faces incredible and seemingly insurmountable problems. I have friends from seminary, priests, serving in their home country of Burundi who report to me that the years long famine that has stricken their region has resulted in more and more cases of starvation and malnutrition for people in their communities. We have people living in our community here in Flat Rock that are refugees who fled the violence and uncertainty of their war torn country of Ukraine. We hear in the news in our own country, seemingly more and more situations of mass violence and murder perpetrated by people so inflicted with sin and hatred that they take up arms against members of their own communities.

How do we navigate life in the midst of a seemingly never ceasing storm? Blizzards, ice storms, wildfires, rising temperatures... inflation, a shrinking workforce, debt ceilings. We all hear the news. More often than not our attempts to navigate life do not make the news. Regardless of whether they are personal struggles or family matters, however, they are just as real and of no less concern to God. Each of us could tell stories about the questions we face, the challenges we confront, and the difficulties we must overcome. Sometimes we seem to succeed and other times we don't.

Most of us have been taught to navigate the waters of life through power, strength, accomplishment, and acquisition. We work to be rich so we can have what we want. We seek power so we can take what we want. We argue to be right so we can have our way. We compete to win so we'll be respected and admired. We want to be beautiful so we'll be liked and desired. Any of that sound familiar? Ever tried those ways of getting through life?

Those attitudes fill headline news, magazine articles, social media, television, and our own lives. They find their origin in the idea that we are to be self-made people, that we are to build up ourselves and make a life. After all we must look out for number one because if we don't look out for ourselves no one will. At least that's what many of us have been told. For too long that has been the myth with which we have lived. Jesus' life and teaching fly in the face of that myth. Jesus offers a different way of navigating life.

The waters of life, Jesus says, are navigable. But it's not through power, it's not through strength, accomplishment, or acquisition. The way forward is not the way we've always done it. It is not enough for us, as believers and followers of Jesus, to simply "make over" a little piece of our world or life. It is not enough to just reform a political or economic system. Navigating life is not about overcoming circumstances or other people. It is about overcoming ourselves.

If you want to know what overcoming yourself looks like, then thankfully we can look at the beatitudes.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit.
- Blessed are those who mourn.
- Blessed are the meek.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- Blessed are the merciful.
- Blessed are the pure in heart.
- Blessed are the peacemakers.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

That is how we navigate life. That is how we meet the challenges, the uncertainties, and the difficulties of life. That is what we are to teach our children and grandchildren. A lifetime of living the beatitudes day after day, year after year, is how we overcome ourselves.

The beatitudes are not simply Jesus' helpful hints for happy living. They are not the church's version of a "Dear Abby" column. They illustrate God's mind and Jesus' heart. They are kingdom values and reveal what kingdom life is like. They shape and form our lives and longings to be like God's life and longings. That's an incredibly different approach. Most of the

time we twist and distort God's life and longings to fit ours. That's why the beatitudes are so radical and often seem so out of reach.

As we hear Jesus' words and consider the beatitudes it's easy to look at ourselves and say, "That is not me, that is not the world, that is not even the church." You're right, it's not. We tend to look at what we rather than what we may become. God, however, focuses on what we can become, who we are called to be.

The temptation is to think that the beatitudes are rules or conditions for being blessed or receiving our heavenly reward. I'm not convinced that is what they are. The beatitudes are not about building up, accomplishing, or acquiring. The beatitudes are about letting go, surrendering, living with a vulnerable and open heart. Now, this absolutely does not mean we run away, back down, or isolate ourselves from the realities of our life and world.

It does mean that we engage them in a different way, Jesus' way. The beatitudes teach us to trust God more than the external circumstances of our lives. They invite dependence on God rather than self-reliance. In today's world that may sound a lot like weakness and foolishness. And that may be what such a perspective sounds like in every age. But to those who are being saved it is strength, it is the power of God. God chose what is foolish to shame the wise and what is weak to shame the strong. The beatitudes are nothing less than the way of the cross.

The fullest expression of a living a life of the beatitudes is seen in Jesus' crucifixion. If we live the beatitudes, they will take us to the cross. And we will see, as Paul of Tarsus saw, Paul, a man who didn't so much undergo a conversion, but rather experienced a divine revelation, a profound moment of Epiphany, Paul saw that "the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." I hope we see that also.

In the trauma and setbacks of life we discover that we cannot *do life* by ourselves. As we admit our need of God's love and presence in our lives, we find purity of heart.

The arrogance of self-sufficiency gives way to meekness. We realize that all that we are and all that we have is from God and we begin to know ourselves as poor in spirit. Our own misfortunes awaken and connect us to the pain of the world for which we cannot help but mourn. We think less

about ourselves and become more merciful to others. We have nowhere else to go and so we turn our gaze back to God. The longer we gaze at God the more we hunger and thirst for righteousness, for God's life, and we become peacemakers reconciling ourselves to God and our neighbor. This is the life for which Christ's disciples are willing to be persecuted, a life of righteousness, the life for which Christ died and rose again.

The beatitudes are not so much about what we do, as how we are. They are less about actions and more about relationships. To live the beatitudes is to live a life of reckless, exuberant, self-abandonment to God and our neighbor. That's called love. The only reason we can do that is because we know and trust ourselves to have already been blessed by God. We live the beatitudes as a response to God blessing us. That is the way of Christ. That is not only **the way forward through this life, it is *the way to life***. If we are to follow Christ it must become our way. I pray that it may be so.