

We are God's Healers

Isaiah 61: 1-4; Matthew 5: 1-12

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**A paradox:** A paradox is a self-contradictory statement. Here is a broader definition from Merriam-Webster: *“something (such as a situation) that is made up of two opposite things and that seems impossible but is actually true or possible.”* Some examples in everyday language could be: “Jumbo Shrimp.” “If you didn’t get this message, call me.” “Nobody goes to that restaurant because it is too crowded.” The scripture focus for today is “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted”. There is a paradox here because this verse is sometimes translated as “Happy are the sad”. The question we all ask of Jesus is, how can we possibly be happy when sad? This is an unusual thing to say about blessedness, joy, or happiness, but no one spoke like Jesus did.

**A constant in life is change.** In order to understand and incorporate this teaching in our lives, I think it is important to understand that much of life is about change. Change often means the loss (or death) of one thing, and the beginning (the life) of something else. Change involves the loss of something for the gain of something else. One could also say the death of one thing and the birth of something new. Eric Kolbell discussed in his book, “What Jesus meant: The beatitudes and a Meaningful Life,” that *“our lives are lived in a series of lives and deaths, comings and goings, gains and losses. (p41)”* From the uterus to birth; from infancy to being a toddler; from childhood to adolescence to being an adult, to middle age and finally to old age make us realize there are so many changes in one’s life! We often mourn the changes in life. *“Loss blows through our bodies like a chilled breeze on a winter’s day, catches us up short, pokes holes in our myths of invulnerability, demand that we look it straight in the eye and reckon with it.(Kolbell, p43)”* When we recognize it, and reckon with it, then we can use it for good - and even for joy!

**Love is painful.** When someone we love deeply passes away, it creates so much sadness, that it is hard to imagine living on without them. Tears of sadness show how you have loved and lost. But you are most blessed to have had the experience of loving your loved one! To have loved means that you have experienced what is most precious in life – to love another. This love is a precious gift from our Lord. But, pity those who do not mourn, for they have not experienced what is most precious in life. They are the most deprived people on earth! Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.

**Being truly alive:** Being truly alive involves pain. I believe that Jesus is telling us in this beatitude that in order to live an abundant/full life which God wants for us here on earth, we are to be open to all that life offers and brings – the good and the bad, the happy and the sad.

Father Damien, a catholic priest who lived in the mid 1800’s was a missionary to those who were suffering from leprosy in Molokai. He was there for 13 years. In time, he also got leprosy. The first sign that he had this dreaded disease was when he spilled some boiling water on his foot and he did not feel the slightest feeling of pain. He knew immediately that he had leprosy – because he could not feel pain! Being unable to feel pain was his clue that death had come to

his body, and little by little, it would overcome it. How much better it would be for him if the boiling water caused him pain because then he would know that he was healthy and fully alive. It would be so life limiting if we were not able to feel the pain of our loss and the losses of others. If our everyday, normal lives happiness is something we seek and sadness is something we try to avoid. The Simon and Garfunkel song from the 1960's illustrates this attitude: *"I am a rock, I am an island. And the rock feels no pain, and the island never cries."* Priest and Author Simon Tugwell put it this way: *"BLESSED are those who mourn" is, paradoxically, a more necessary message than "Rejoice in the Lord always," because there can be no true rejoicing until we have stopped running away from mourning."*

**Wounded healers:** In Isaiah 61: 1-4 we read the prophet proclaiming hope for the future to all those who mourn. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus himself took the scroll from the prophet Isaiah and read this same scripture – though he read verse one and the first part of verse 2. Jesus told the assembling crowd in the temple in Luke 4: 21: *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* Jesus is inferring that he is that promised Messiah who was to be the one to bring about this new life out of the ashes. Jesus was wounded and killed because of individual sin and death and everything that leads to death. Then Jesus rose from the dead to conquer death and provide new life now and eternal life! Jesus is the wounded healer who comforts all those who mourn and experience pain and suffering, because of various types of loss. For example, the loss of a loved one; the loss of a job; a loss of freedom; a loss of one's country (refugee); a loss of one's life; etc.

Theologian Henri Nouwen wrote a book called, "The wounded healer". He encourages followers of Christ to serve others from the knowledge that we are all wounded healers. We all have experienced suffering and wounds, and from that perspective we are better equipped to help, comfort, and bring healing to others and help them to become stronger to face loss. Just being a presence already provides strength, courage, and healing. One of our members mentioned to me this week that their father died when she was a child. Not long ago, she heard of someone who was a friend of a friend who had lost their father recently. Our church member sent a message to the person who lost their father stating that if they were willing to talk about it, she would be happy to. The person who was mourning was so touched by the offer that he said he was already strengthened by the note. Our member is a wounded healer.

**Shared Blessings:** Last month, a woman in Vancouver, Oregon was going through the drive-through of Dutch Bros ordering a coffee. She was crying. She had just lost her 37 year old husband. The nineteen year old employee at the window gave her a free coffee and offered to pray with her. They prayed along with two other employees who reached out to hold the woman's hand. One of the employees who prayed said he was not religious, but felt if this woman needed prayer, he was going to give her what she needed. The nineteen year old Pierce Dunn, who first offered to pray for the woman said that moment was absolutely incredible. "It was so emotional."

"She was crying. I shed a few tears. We've cried since as well. When something that real happens - it hits close to home." The woman experienced comfort and support. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Let us be God's healers who are fully alive by not avoiding and running away from mourning. Our Lord didn't and it made all the difference. Amen.

*(Eric Kolbell: "What Jesus Meant – the Beatitudes and a Meaningful Life" Westminster, John Knox Press, 2003.)*

