

## Matthew 5:1-12

I know today is Super Bowl XLV: The Pittsburgh Steelers vs. The Green Bay Packers. How many don't care? That's about all I know about it except we get to go to a "watch and EAT" party tonight! I also know we here in Columbus are excited about the OSU men's basketball team being 23 and 0. I know a little bit more about college basketball than pro football, but not much! I know it's great they're #1 in college basketball and they play Minnesota today, bringing another opportunity to "watch and EAT!" I also know Thad Matta used to be the men's coach at Xavier University because we used to live in Cincinnati.

While there I heard a great story about another one of Xavier's former basketball coaches, Pete Gillen. One night in New York City at a banquet in his honor, one of the gifts he received was a huge wall clock. He returned to the hotel carrying that big clock. He entered the hotel revolving door just as a man was leaving and the door got jammed. After they finally got it unstuck, the other man said to Gillen, "Why can't you just wear a wristwatch like everybody else?"

"Be like everybody else." That's the focus of our culture, isn't it? I don't think anyone really enjoys being different except if it's to be #1. There's something in each of us that wants to be liked and we believe those who "fit in" are generally more accepted and feel more significant. We learn early to "go along to get along."

Several years ago there was a study done of over 300 Harvard graduates to determine the ingredients of a successful life. Every year until they retired a questionnaire was sent to them to fill out and send back. A psychiatrist named Valliant compiled all these statistics and put his findings into a book entitled, Adaptation to Life. It said the secret of success is adapting to life. In Biblical terminology it might read, "conforming to the world."

People magazine ran a story on Dr. Valliant after the book was published. He was pictured standing in front of a movie screen on which had been projected two words, "mature" and "neurotic." Under "mature" were listed the characteristics of what he felt made a successful life. Under "neurotic" were the characteristics he felt led to failure. You couldn't help but notice; under the category of "neurotic" were those qualities similar to what Jesus taught.

Today we call a particular collection of Jesus' teachings the "Sermon on the Mount." It's a character and behavior manual for those who choose to follow Christ. Today's scripture focuses on the preface to the Sermon on the Mount called the "Beatitudes." It's disturbing reading, especially if you live according to the standards of the world and you want to be liked by everyone.

It bothers ME. I'm striving to live as a Christian yet I must also live and get along in the world. I don't want to be considered a fool. So I don't come easily to these passages which say the Christian life is set over against the world. However, Paul writes to the Corinthians, and to us, "to the world the Christian life looks like foolishness, but hold to it anyway because there's power in it." (1 Cor 1:18)

Of course when we think about it, some basic cultural and generational differences will always exist--like the boy who went to his dad's room early one

morning and said, "Today is Nerd Day at school, Dad. Can I borrow some of your clothes?" Some of us are different whether we want to be or not!

Let's review what Jesus is teaching his disciples, those who have made the decision to follow him, but need guidance for the journey. I am reading for you the Beatitudes as they are interpreted by Eugene Peterson in his contemporary paraphrase of the New Testament called The Message. He writes:

"When Jesus saw his ministry drawing huge crowds, he climbed a hillside. Those who were apprenticed to him, the committed, climbed with him. Arriving at a quiet place, he sat down and taught his climbing companions. (Isn't that a great name for disciples: "climbing companions!") This is what he said,

"You're blessed when you're at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and His rule.

"You're blessed when you feel you've lost what is most dear to you. Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

"You're blessed when you're content with just who you are - no more, no less. That's the moment you find you are the proud owner of everything that can't be bought.

"You're blessed when you've worked up a good appetite for God. He's food and drink in the best meal you'll ever eat.

"You're blessed when you care. At the moment of being 'care-full,' you find yourself cared for.

"You're blessed when you get your inside world - your mind and heart - put right. Then you can see God in the outside world.

"You're blessed when you can show people how to cooperate instead of compete or fight. That's when you discover who you really are, and your place in God's family.

"You're blessed when your commitment to God provokes persecution. The persecution drives you even deeper into God's kingdom.

"Not only that - count yourselves blessed every time people put you down or throw you out or speak lies about you to discredit me. What it means is the truth is too close for comfort and they are uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens - give a cheer, even! For though they don't like it, I do! And all heaven applauds. And know this: you are in good company. My prophets and witnesses have always gotten into this kind of trouble."

I think Peterson offers us a great understanding of the Beatitudes. But no matter how you write them, not everyone will like them, because living by them is not easy. Of course we know, Jesus didn't come to make life easy.

The theologian, William Barclay, writes, "It's not likely death awaits us because of our loyalty to the Christian faith. But insult awaits the (one) who insists on Christian honor. Mockery awaits the (one) who practices Christian love and forgiveness. Actual persecution may well await the Christian in industry who insists on doing an honest day's work. Christ still needs his witnesses; he needs those who are prepared, not so much to die for him, as to live for him."

Yes, Jesus' teachings seem foolish to the world, but maybe the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount are saying - to follow Christ is to do something about the way the world is now, to make it the way Christ wants it to be. If Christ came to renew the world, one person at a time, then we must be a part of the renewing. It becomes a part of our purpose for living.

Jesus was crucified not because there was something wrong with him, but because there was something terribly wrong with the world. It takes courage to be different. However, the old adage rings true, "If we don't stand for something, we'll fall for anything." Something or someone WILL mold our character and behavior. We must choose who and what that will be.

Why choose a model that is different and difficult? Jesus says because we will be blessed - here and now. Being "blessed" infers a Godly peace and joy that is deeper than happiness. Happiness is dependent on things going right outside ourselves. Joy is an inside job, an attitude we cultivate. It's a way of looking at and interpreting events. It's remembering what we "know" as a Christian.

When we know we are loved, that's joy.

When we know our lives have purpose and what we do is important, that's joy.

When we know our sins are forgiven and there is life beyond this life, that's joy.

When we know we are accepted in spite of our weaknesses and failures, that's joy.

When we know who we are, and Whose we are, that's joy.

Joy is the result of doing what is right because it is right, not because it is popular. The world has become cynical about all that and I'm afraid some people in the Church have become that way, too.

I'm reminded of the words found in our newsletter this month. They are attributed to different authors; one is the late Mother Teresa. They are words to challenge as well as disturb the Christian. She says:

"People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered. Love them anyway.

If you do good, people may accuse you of selfish motives. Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you may win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway.

Honesty and transparency make you vulnerable. Be honest and transparent anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.

People who really want help may attack you if you help them. Help them anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you may get hurt. Give the world your best anyway."-- Mother Teresa

I believe Jesus was a model of those words. He wasn't unaware of the cost of discipleship, but after his teaching, he encouraged the disciples with these words: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) We may pay a

price. But Jesus also says we will receive a blessing: the peace and joy that comes from being who we are called to be and doing what we are called to do.

Each Sunday we come to worship because it's a time to re-member. That's the opposite of dis-member.

When we dismember something, we take it apart.

When we re-member something, we put it back together.

We come back together as a fellowship to praise God and encourage each other on our journeys.

Today we also celebrate communion. As we re-member, we also re-new our commitment and re-view our gratitude for what God has done for us in Christ.

The truth is, however, sometimes we forget. We fall apart; we don't follow the teachings and we don't make the right choices. But that's the purpose of communion and the joy of belonging to Christ.

He says, "I know you don't always get it right, but ... I love you ... anyway!"