



Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church

Asheville, North Carolina

February 2, 2020

Children's Service

Sermon: "Something New"

**Preachers: Rev. Samantha Gonzalez-Block, Marta Rosal (5th grade),
Millie Stradley (4th grade)**

Psalm 15

Matthew 5:1-10

Psalm 15

*O Lord, who may abide in your tent?
Who may dwell on your holy hill?*

*Those who walk without blame, and do what is right,
and speak the truth from their heart;*

*who do not slander with their tongue,
and do no evil to their friends,*

*nor take up a reproach against their neighbors;
in whose eyes the wicked are despised,*

*but who honor those who fear the Lord;
who stand by their oath even to their hurt;*

*who do not lend money at interest,
and do not take a bribe against the innocent.*

Those who do these things, shall never be moved.

Matthew 5:1-10:

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. thanks

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

~

Samantha: love this Bible passage, don't you? The Beatitudes are just so...*inspiring!*

Marta: Inspiring? More like confusing!

Millie: Tell me about it! What's a Be-Attitude anyway? Sounds like a bee with attitude.

Samantha: The Beatitudes is just a fancy word for blessings. Jesus is sharing his ideas with his disciples about who he believes should be called blessed.

Marta: Yeah, but his list is so...bizarre.

Millie: Yeah... "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven?" Why?

Marta: Or, how about "Blessed are the persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven?" What are the poor and the persecuted going do - split heaven down the middle?

Millie: And is Jesus saying that it's good to be hungry, or meek, or sad? I don't know about you, but no thank you! I think sometimes it's better to not show people you are weak, because they might bully you. And I definitely don't like feeling hungry.

Samantha: You make some good points here, this passage can be tricky to understand. I guess we read it so much in church (and it's so poetic) that we don't always stop and *really* think about what is Jesus' main message here?

Marta: All I know is, his message seems a lot different from the messages we hear today. Think about it: ALL of the messages we hear at school, on the news, and in our society don't mention anything positive about being poor or persecuted...most messages tell us that we need to be independent and successful to be "hashtag blessed."

Millie: Yeah, messages tell us that we have to be the smartest student in our class, the strongest competitor, or the prettiest-girliest girl or toughest big boy. These messages are all around us every day, and they don't always feel so good - sometimes they can be really hurtful. I know personally that it can hurt.

Marta: We can't be the only ones who struggle with these messages. *(to the congregation)* I wonder, what negative messages do you all hear? *(people respond)*

Samantha: You have helped us name something really important here. We receive so many messages that can feel negative, divisive, even isolating. But Jesus' message feels so different - like something totally new.

Millie: Maybe his message has something to do with who Jesus was as a person. He was God and he was a human. God chose to come to earth, not as a rich king, but as a poor little baby. I mean, it's ok to be poor, but he was born in a barn for goodness sake!

Marta: Yeah! There wasn't even room for him in the inn. There wasn't even room for God to be born in a safe, warm place.

Samantha: So what I am hearing is...maybe one of God's primary reasons for coming into the world was to really turn it upside down.

Marta and Millie: Amen!

Samantha: It feels like God as Jesus was sending an important message to us all: the poor matter, there is something holy about those who mourn, there is something sacred about the marginalized and the forgotten. I wonder if this resonates with you...have you ever felt the sort of comfort, empowerment and hope Jesus speaks about?

Marta: You know, I think I have.

Millie: Me too.

Samantha: Well, then please, share your stories. Maybe your experiences will help us all understand Jesus' *confusing* message - and what it can mean for us today - things like: Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Marta will you go first?

Marta: About a year ago, I was about to go to bed, then I saw a picture of my dog, who had passed away about three years ago. All of a sudden, I remembered how fun, nice (kinda), and honestly, sometimes a little bit naughty my dog was! I got sad and I started crying.

My mom came over and asked me what was wrong. I told her that I really missed him, and she gave me a big hug. It felt good and it helped me get through that moment. Also, even though the picture is what made me sad in the first place, looking at it reminds me that he's still here! He is still here with me.

Jesus says: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." This whole story taught me that if you don't show that you're in mourning, then no one will know to comfort you. If you hold your feelings in, you may never get through them. So, we should mourn freely and without fear. God shows us through the kindness and care of friends and family that Jesus loves us and will always be there for us.

Samantha: Thanks, Marta. You really help us see that the comfort Jesus is speaking about is often standing right in front of us. It can show up in the ways we treat each other and the ways we make space to gently hold each other's feelings.

Millie: And sometimes God's comfort can be felt when we are playing with animals, or walking outside, or seeing the beautiful mountains.

Marta: Yeah, when we let ourselves be open and honest - we let God and others in. How have you experienced God's comfort, Millie?

Millie: I remember when my grandmother was in hospice. I was awakened by my crying mom who mumbled to me, "Your grandma passed away. Your Dad (Matt Stradley) is already down there. Come on. You can stay in your PJ's but let's go NOW." We ran to the car and took a sad, lonely five – ten minute drive.

It was silent until I started to cry, but first I sniffled than it all came out in buckets and buckets. "I think we all knew what was going to happen," my mom (Laurie Stradley) said. "It rained this hard when my grandma died. God is opening the gates to heaven."

My mom's words reminded me so much of Jesus' words. It is OK to mourn and cry - comfort is coming. My teardrops helped my mom and I finally see the rainbow. God was opening up the gates to heaven and welcoming my grandmother in.

Samantha: Millie thanks for helping us see that even when our pain is raw - God is still present, bringing healing and hope in every moment.

Marta: We have to try to remember that! Because sometimes when we are feeling upset, we can feel like it will never get better.

Millie: And we can feel embarrassed to cry or say what we need, but Jesus calls our tears "blessed" and helps us get through the hard stuff.

Samantha: So I guess we finally understand everything about Jesus' Beatitudes, huh?

Marta: Not so fast, Samantha. What about meekness? The meek will inherit the earth? How can gentleness and quietness do that? The messages we hear tell us to be powerful and confident - not meek.

Samantha: Yeah, it is really cool that Jesus' message really seems to celebrate the opposite - the moments of timidness are the times when we really get to lean on God and each other for support.

Millie: Marta, I know that you love to sing, but have you ever had moments when you have felt afraid?

Marta: Of course.

Millie: Tell us more.

Marta: On the morning of opening night for my show *Frozen*, I was really scared that I would mess up. I actually had stage fright! I could not stand still, I was fidgeting, and I even felt sick. I didn't think I could go on, but I did.

I went on because my friends were right beside me and my family was in the audience. My friends told me that I was going to be amazing, and I knew my family wouldn't judge me so I knew I was going to be OK. Even if I had messed up no one was going to make fun of me.

When I got on stage I saw all the faces staring at me and.... I was fine! This taught me that even when you're feeling meek, nervous, or shy you will have support and you will be amazing! Always believe in yourself and the people who believe in you.

I felt blessed to have so many people who believe in me. God showed me that no matter how I feel there will be at least some people who have trust in me. When you lack confidence, others will have the confidence in you that you need.

Millie: It's amazing when the people we love give us the courage we need to get out on stage and trust in ourselves.

Marta: Have there ever been times when you have experienced that too?

Millie: Absolutely.

Marta: Will you tell us?

Millie: My friend Sasha is a really quiet person but when I got bullied she was tough. I was pushed around by being told "Shut up, Sucker," and "Give it up Amelia Earhart you are going to go boooou boooom!" When I heard these things, I started to cry. Then, she said to the person who was being mean to me: "HEY DON'T BE MEAN TO MY FRIEND, BE MEAN TO DIRT, OR YOUR SELF, YOU BULLY!" My Face was so surprised!

I think she got the strength from her past. She was bullied a lot in third grade. She probably knew what it felt like. The bully never got within five feet of me or her, ever. This taught me that the weak are the strongest people of all by showing that if you know what it feels like, you are more likely to help. Always believe in those you love and care about.

Sasha was meek, but when it came to her friends she was the toughest, roughest and the most caring at the same time. She stood up for what she believed in. This reminds me of when Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

Samantha: So what I am hearing is, there are times in our lives when we need to be reminded that we are blessed, and times in our lives when we need to stand up for others and remind them that they are blessed too.

Marta: Yeah, no matter how young or old you are, you can still doubt yourself sometimes. So, you need people to tell you that God sees your gifts, and needs you to offer them to the world: "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*"

Millie: And no matter how young or old you are, people can be mean to one another. So, you need people who will speak out for what's right, and be bold enough to stand up for all of God's people: "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*"

Samantha: Amen, sisters! I guess Jesus' Beatitudes help remind us that we are all children of God, worthy of dignity, respect and a chance to taste and see Christ's love. We are called to help each other know that and experience that. So, in this world of so many negative messages, how are we going to help God's message of love and justice and kindness be the loudest message of all?

Millie: Hey, I got it! At school we are doing something called the "great kindness challenge." Where we try to do random acts of kindness - like helping someone up, or giving them a high five, or saying hello to someone new at school. Things like this can remind people that they are blessed.

Marta: And here at church we show people God's love through worshipping together and doing service. Here, we celebrate "children of all ages" and help each other trust that God sees us, loves us and wants us to do what's right!

Samantha: These are great ideas.

Millie: And we're not done yet. Words matter. Messages matter. *(to the congregation)* Instead of negative words, what are some positive messages that we can tell each other? *(people answer)*

Samantha: So, the Beatitudes are more than just a long list to quickly read through. They are worth stopping and exploring. When you think about it, they are a call to action - a call to see each other differently, to see the world differently.

Marta: Maybe his message is meant to confuse us! His words are meant to confuse the way things have always been, so that we can focus on creating something new - together!

Millie: Jesus wants us to comfort those who mourn, to encourage the meek, to lift up the poor, to celebrate the peacemakers - *it's amazing!*

Marta: Jesus wants us to love harder and hold each other closer. He wants us to be a friend to the forgotten, and speak out for the outcast.

Samantha: No matter how the world treats us, no matter how hopeless we feel, Jesus wants us to taste and see that we are all children of God.

Millie: The Beatitudes are about a different attitude of living, being, and loving.

Marta: Jesus invites us to hold up a new message.

Millie: A message that can change everything.

Samantha: A message that can heal the world. That message is:

ALL: You are blessed.