

Disruptive Thinking

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Today we read the beginning of Jesus' greatest sermon. It is the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins with a series of phrases that are so extraordinary and radical that people have quoted them throughout the centuries. We call them the beatitudes. The word '**beatitudes**' is derived from *beatitudo*, a Latin word meaning 'blessedness;' hence, the name is used to refer to this biblical passage where each verse begins with the word "blessed." Now the word blessed or blessedness is not something we use every day. That word hit its peak in the 1800's and has steadily gone down. Blessed means being in divine favor. Today I will read from Eugene Peterson's *Message* which is the Bible in Contemporary Language. Since the beatitudes are familiar, reading in modern language may help us to hear Jesus' words like we are hearing them for the very first time. (I encourage you to follow along with the pew Bibles which are the NRSV.) **Matthew 5:1-12 from *The Message*:**

¹When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ³"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

In one of the recent churches that I served, I taught an Adult Lenten Study on the beatitudes. By the way, that is what we will be doing on Wednesday

evenings during Lent. We were studying how Jesus has a way of turning things on their head. The “blessed” begins as you would expect to hear only to end in surprising ways. One of the members in the class turned to his neighbor and said “sounds like disruptive thinking to me.” I looked around and others nodded because they were familiar with that term. They saw my questioning expression and he told me that in his work place Disruptive Thinking was the new goto term as a business model. Like any 21st century pastor, I looked it up on the internet. I found an article called, *Disruptive Thinking; fostering a culture game-changing leadership*. Luke Williams a professor of innovation from the NYU Stern School of Business wrote: “to compete in today’s fast-changing world, businesses need a steady stream of disruptive ideas.” He goes on to say our natural tendencies are to surround ourselves with people similar to us who reinforce our own ideas. We also don’t want to waste our time with far out ideas and so we stick to the safe and conventional. Wasting time could make us lag behind the pace of change. Sounds all too familiar in our churches!

As I read more about Disruptive thinking, I had the Bible open to Matthew, chapter 4. Professor Williams is not saying anything new. Here is Jesus introducing us to Disruptive thinking in the first century with the beatitudes. Jesus, in his very first sermon to the people was going totally out of the box. Blessed are the poor in spirit, or as Eugene Peterson puts it, all you out there who are at the end of your rope, you are blessed. You are the favored ones! How contrary! Shouldn’t we be judging those poor in spirit because they can’t handle the normal challenges that we call life? Should we be blessing the full in spirit the ones who succeed in life? Blessed are the meek, those who feel lost and without voice? Don’t you know it is the one who holds the power holds the majority that always wins! What is Jesus telling us in these words that seem so familiar but then don’t really apply to us, or do they? Jesus’ words run counter to his audience in first century Palestine. The people listening to him knew how the powerful held all the cards. The ones in charge have all the advantage. Roman leaders thought that they were divinely blessed and they certainly were not meek!

In order for these words of Jesus to make any sense to us and move us to another way of thinking, we need to lift them out of the category of well-worn clichés and shake them up a bit. Blessed are those who mourn, not the satisfied self-sufficient ones, but the ones who need comfort. Blessed are those who care about others and who are not always looking out for themselves or their family. When you are full of care, you find that you are cared for. Blessed our inter-connection, not our own individualism.

Disruptive thinking says that taking what happened in the past can no longer be a predictor for the future. As the people heard Jesus, it was not like anything that they heard before. It was a new way to approach the same life that they were living. Jesus' words gave them a new lens to see the world. We know that our world is changing rapidly and it is only accelerating. Thomas Freidman in his book, *thank you for being late*. He talks about how our accessibility of knowledge keeps exponentially expanding in shorter amounts of time. Think of the gains in technology or the example of how we store our information. This week my husband brought home a backup hard drive that holds 500 gigabytes or ½ terabyte the size of a post it notes. The changes in our world are overwhelming! We are in a new territory, which calls for disruptive thinking on our part.

If Jesus is our model of disruptive thinking, we need to get rid of our stereotypes and clichés that are used to soothe the disruptions. As a reformed church, we have seen change within our DNA. Our church does not look like what Calvin or John Knox or Martin Luther could have even imagined. Some communities of faith try to hang on to their past notions of church. Some try to conform to what our world expects of people of faith, benign people trying to appease everyone. Blessed are those who are persecuted for my sake. Standing up for love of all people is not the most popular, particularly in a climate of distrust in an atmosphere where fear holds power. But Jesus's disruptive thinking breaks through that when he asked "who is our neighbor?" Jesus does not limit our neighborhood to those who look and act like us. Jesus begins his ministry turning things on his head. Blessed are you when you work up a good appetite for God. God will fill you! Blessed are you when you care; when you go out of yourself and reach out to others.

I bet Jesus still had them but then there is this turn, a turn that should make even the most devote and care-filled person squirm. “You are blessed when people persecute you. What?? Nothing is fun about persecution and being reviled. Jesus continues and says “rejoice and be glad.” You are in good company. Feel good about taking a stand for justice -- even if the consequences to that stand include mockery and dismissal or worse. We are Christ’s agents for disruption. You are in good company; the prophets were always getting into trouble for God’s sake.

Look! Right here is our nourishment. Today we read the beginning of Jesus’ ministry but we know where it leads. It leads to a sharing of all he has; His life. Therefore, what fills us and what feed us is God’s presence with us. Not only are Jesus’ words so profound; the life he lives and the life he gave has the ability to disrupt, not only our thinking, but our actions as well.

So, are you ready to be Christ’s disrupted agents? Are you prepared to stir things up beyond your own presuppositions? Are you ready to look at the word in new light? This is a shameless plug for the study on Wednesday evenings during lent on the Beatitudes. IF you can’t do that, commit to reading and looking at Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount as if you were hearing it for the first time and see how it can disrupt your life in ways that make a difference. Thanks be to God. Amen!