

### **PSALM 25:8-15 (NEB)**

The Lord is good and upright; therefore he teaches sinners the way they should go. He guides the humble in doing right, he teaches the humble his ways. All the ways of the Lord are loving and sure to those who keep his covenant and his charge. For the honor of thy name, O Lord, forgive my wickedness, great as it is.

If there is a person who fears the Lord, he shall be shown the path that he should choose; he shall enjoy lasting prosperity, and his children after him shall inherit the land. The Lord confides his purposes to those who fear him, and his covenant is theirs to know. My eyes are ever on the Lord, who alone can free my feet from the net.

### **MATTHEW 5:1-11**

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.

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.

## EXPRESSING OUR FAITH: PART II

### THE HEIRS

**PSALM 25:8-15**  
**MATTHEW 5:1-11**

What in the world is going on? Where to begin? About eight weeks ago, we were blissfully going about our business, living life as we always have. And while we began to hear news about a new virus over in China which was turning into an epidemic, we were assured that it was staying over there and it was “very much under control” here. And then we found out it was in South Korea and then in Europe and then...**Everywhere**. And now we are basically quarantined. Really? Who would have thought?

While COVID totally dominates the news, let us not forget issues that have currently receded to the background. Politically speaking, the Chinese are not so quietly expanding their influence in Africa and the South China Sea. Putin is making inroads into Europe and the Middle East, attempting to break down NATO, aggressively continuing to develop Russia’s long range missile program, preparing to create chaos in our upcoming elections while also becoming the dominant player in Iraq and Syria. Iran and Saudi Arabia employ their proxy militias across the region elevating tensions and violence while Syrian and Turkey continue to displace thousands of their citizens.

The United States’ role in global affairs is often perplexing. While the assassination of Iranian General Soleimani undoubtedly satisfied our need for revenge and perhaps ultimately saved American lives, it may also have lit a slow burning fuse which will lead to further explosive confrontation in the future. Who knows? And it must also be noted that while there are numbers of people to directly blame for the missile assault on the Ukrainian airliner killing 176 passengers and crew (remember that?), it was collateral damage from the drone strike on Soleimani. Once the train leaves the station, you cannot bring it back. And so it all raises the political question of who is really interested in making peace? You tell me; I don’t even hear

the word mentioned anymore. It seems to have been excised from our vocabularies.

Unfortunately, this is the way of the world and always has been. It is brought home in the currently running Netflix movie, "The King," skillfully directed by Brad Pitt. It is the story of King Henry V who reluctantly succeeded to the throne in the fifteenth century when his brother is killed in battle. The irony depicted in this film is gripping. For prior to his succession, Henry was a strong advocate of peace who decried the bloody war which England and France had been waging for 76 years costing lives and fortunes to be uselessly and shamefully lost on both sides.

But soon after his enthronement, Henry is insulted by the crown prince of France and after much debate with his advisors, Henry decides that his honor has been impugned and that he must seek revenge for the glory of the motherland. He gathers his troops and off they go to France to continue the war and avenge the insult. It resulted in the famous Battle of Agincourt which the British won, but the cost in lives, treasure and suffering was immense. For what?

English comedian John Cleese of Monty Python fame once observed about politicians, "You can be as nasty as you like, and yet feel your behavior is morally justified. So you can strut around abusing people and telling them you can eat them for breakfast, and still think of yourself as a champion of the truth, a fighter for the greater good, and not the rather sad, paranoid schizoid that you really are." As of January, The Doomsday Clock was down to 100 seconds reflecting the increased threat of nuclear warfare and the phlegmatic response of world governments to the rapidly changing climate.

Contrast our current state of affairs with God's vision of the world presented to us through Jesus. The Beatitudes describe a starkly different mindset for those who seek the spiritual high road. In Latin, beatitude means a supreme state of happiness—of bliss, really. In Aramaic, the language Jesus used, it translates into "blessed." So blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are those in mourning; blessed are the meek, blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness; blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, those

being persecuted. You might think that these are perhaps the downtrodden, the victims, and the more lowly caretakers. Certainly they are not the high and the mighty who make wars and send millions to their deaths and destroy cities in the process, changing the entire landscape of civilization.

They are, in fact, the opposite. The blessed are the ones God considers to be worthy of honor and frankly, of salvation. *The Lord is good and upright; therefore he teaches sinners the way they should go. He guides the humble in doing right, he teaches the humble his ways...If there is a person who fears the Lord, he shall be shown the path that he should choose; he shall enjoy lasting prosperity, and his children after him shall inherit the land.*

From the Beatitudes, I want to focus specifically on the concept of “meekness” for it underlies everything Jesus is speaking of. In Aramaic, the meek are not pathetic, powerless people. Jesus held them up as examples because the common understanding of the word’s definition is peaceable, humble, flexible, able to work well with others. They are free from temper tantrums, the narcissistic need for vindication and validation which often lead to bloodshed, murder and war. And in that sense, they are blessed and serve as models for the rest of humanity.

There is an interesting background too for Jesus’ statement that the meek will inherit the earth. For it was customary in the Middle East that when a man died and left no male heir that the meritorious meek would inherit his property. Landlords much preferred to lease their vineyards and farms to men of good character who were responsible and reliable. When the Romans executed Galilean rebels, they confiscated their property and gave it to those who were not seditious. It led to blessedness for those meek souls who then rose in power and prosperity.

Make no mistake—in his sermons, Jesus is recruiting people for the building of God’s kingdom on earth. He doesn’t want those who hunger and thirst for power and domination. He wants the meek who can bend with the winds of the storm and remain calm in the center,

fixated upon their task of mercy and peacemaking. His emphasis was always upon love, forgiveness, humility and compassion. But the world didn't want to hear it then anymore than it wants to hear it now. And Jesus died for it. He foresaw this: *Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

So here we are. The primaries are effectively over and in the next seven months, we will be encouraged to hate each other. Huge egos are going to be on display and the tone will be angry, vitriolic and nasty. And you may say to yourself something like, "If this is the kingdom of God on earth, I need to be on another planet. Take me with you!"

But you know what? Challenges like this are very important in our spiritual growth and the expression of our faith. Because if we pay attention to our internal worlds, we will clearly understand that as we discussed in Part I, we are being tempted. We are being tempted to play the game of division and demonization. We are being tempted to envision the world as a war zone in which the forces of good and evil struggle with each other to determine our fate. Baloney! None of that is true.

So the huge challenge before us which is gaining momentum on all fronts—especially now in our struggle to contain the COVID—will be to stay calm in the storm and keep our hearts open to all people. We need to be meek—to speak up where it is necessary to speak up; to stay silent where it is necessary to remain silent; to listen and to make wise choices. We must acknowledge that we don't know all the answers—no one does. So this automatically means that as we saw last week, there will be choices we make that have plenty of Shades of Gray. And being meek means that we accept that truth, seek information by asking the questions we need answers for and humbly trusting the Spirit to guide us.

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