

“Preparing our hearts”: Matt 5:1-16

Second Sunday of Advent – “Preparing” – Dec 6, 2020

Holy Trinity Church - Tom Mount

Introduction

1. This week’s theme is Preparing; Latin: *praeparare*: “equip in advance”
2. We want to use the season of Advent to prepare ourselves to participate again in the wonder of the incarnation. At deeper level we want to cultivate our hearts so that we are always prepared to be responsive to God.
3. Jesus gave us his followers a composite picture of what a prepared heart looks like in the text we just read, Matthew 5:1-16 (The Beatitudes).

Exposition

“Poor in spirit” (v. 3)

1. Genuine relationship with God always begins here: an honest appraisal of how destitute, bankrupt, desperate we are in light of who God is by nature (Ps 51.17; Is 57.15).
2. Opposite. **Rev 3.17: “You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”**
3. Jesus contrasted the two in **Lk 18.9-14**
4. James 4:6: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

“Mourn” (v. 4)

1. There is blessing, happiness in seeing reality for what it is, to be stripped of all illusions and humbly accept the truth about ourselves and lament it.
2. Ever known a drug addict or alcoholic unwilling to admit their addiction? That’s why the first step in AA is to admit that we are powerless.

3. If we're going to make any progress in the spiritual life, we have to honestly embrace and grieve our condition. We tend to scapegoat, play the victim, blame others.
4. Jesus invites us to be honest: "Stop it! You don't have to do that. Simply confess your sins (agree with God) and repent (turn back to God).
5. When person finally accepts truth about him/herself, tears flow.

"Meek" (v. 5)

1. "Meek" is *praus*: "gentle, humble". Equestrian term: its power is under control. Natural state of horses is raw, undirected power.
2. **Mt 11:28-29: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle (*praus*) and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."**
3. Meek person has accepted the truth about himself. When we live apart from God, we're messed up. But when we live close to Jesus, we can act like him. So, the meek person can drop his pretence and artificiality.
4. The opposite is insecurity: constantly trying to prove ourselves. Meekness is liberating: Nothing to hide, prove or fear.
5. Note the downward progression: Poor – Mournful – Meek

The Downward trajectory (vv. 3-6)

1. **Shaping process** in Jer 18: old clay crushed, kneaded, shaped by potter
 - **Diminishing process:** John the Baptist in Jn 3.30
 - **Refining process:** Peter in 1 Prt 1.7
 - **Pruning process:** Jesus in John 15
 - **Dying process:** Jesus in Jn 12.24
 - **Emptying process:** Jesus in Phil 2
2. As Soren Kierkegaard observed: "***Christianity did not come in order to develop the heroic virtues in the individual, but rather to remove self-centeredness and establish love.***"

3. As we are emptied of self-centeredness, a vacuum is created into God himself can flow, the **Vacare Deo**. As long as we are filled with other things, there is no space for God to fill.
4. What empties us?

“Hunger and thirst for righteousness” (v. 6)

1. We become desperate for more of God. We cry out to him.
2. David expressed this in **Ps 63.1: “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you.”**
3. Note the promise: “They will be filled.” Whenever God’s spirit finds an empty barren space in our hearts, he rushes in to fill it with his cool, life-giving presence.

“Merciful” (v. 7)

1. Those who drink deeply from the cup of God’s mercy can’t help but pass that same cup of mercy to others.
2. When we know ourselves to be rescued from an empty way of life and lavished with rich gifts by God, we let go of our natural inclinations to judge, condemn and accuse. We become people eager to extend mercy, because we ourselves have received it in abundance.

“Pure in Heart” (v. 8)

1. Dictionary: Primary meaning of pure means unadulterated by impurities.
2. Soren Kierkegaard wrote a book: **“Purity of heart is to will one thing.”** (Ps 27:4; 73:25; Phil 3:7-8).
3. The greatest danger for us living in our affluent culture is not having our hearts seduced by bad stuff but having our appetites sated with good stuff so much that we grow numb to God and his kingdom. God warned the Israelites about this in Deut 8.6ff.

4. Jesus warned us about this in **Mk 4.1-20**. **“the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.”**
5. **Ps 86.11**: **“Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.”**

“Peacemakers” (v. 9)

1. We value reconciliation because our Heavenly Father values it, and we now share his nature. That’s why we are called “sons of God”.
2. We help people learn to find peace with God, peace with themselves and peace with others.

“Persecuted for the sake of righteousness” (vv. 10-12)

1. Some people will be drawn to us. But others will hate us; despise all that we value and believe.
2. So you better count on people misunderstanding you, slandering you, lying about you, insulting you. It goes with the turf. What is our response?

“Salt of the earth” (v. 13)

1. We will have a preserving effect on our ambient culture. In the days before refrigeration, salt was the one preservative that could prevent food from spoiling. That’s the effect of our being in the world.

“Light of the world” (v. 14)

1. We show others by our lives, words, actions and reactions the way Jesus lived, the way humans were created to live.

Take away

Where Are You Now in the Process? Wherever you are, Jesus is inviting you to go with him to the next step.