

God's Love Made Real

On Sunday, in lieu of a typical sermon, the Guatemala Mission Team shared the excitement of what they experienced on their trip last year and previewed this year's Navajo Mission Trip. We'll talk a little bit about that, but focus most of our time on Sunday's Scripture passage.

1. Warm up question. Tell us something about yourself that most people don't know.
2. About twelve years ago, our church formed a Global Outreach Board, began sponsoring mission trips, and began providing year-round funding support for key projects in Guatemala, the Navajo Nation, and South Sudan.
 - a. As you heard the Mission Team on Sunday, what insights, thoughts, or lessons did you take away from their presentation?
 - b. Have you ever been on a Mission Trip? How did that experience impact you?
 - c. Do you think it's important for our church to engage in global outreach? Why or why not?
 - d. If you want information about participation in this year's Navajo Nation Trip, be sure to fill out the response form in Sunday's worship bulletin.
3. Read Matthew 5:1-12. The first nine statements in this passage are known as the "beatitudes." A beatitude was/is a statement declaring certain people to be in a privileged, fortunate circumstance. The Greek word for "blessed" means fortunate, happy, in a privileged situation, well-off. In this passage, Jesus takes our traditional notions of who is blessed and turns them upside down.
 - a. As best you understand, what do each of the following terms mean. In other words, what kind of person (or way of living) is being described in each term – and why is it better to be that way?

Poor in spirit	Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness
Those who mourn	The pure in heart
The meek	Those who are persecuted for righteousness
The merciful	Those who are reviled and falsely accused
The peacemakers	
 - b. The opposite of "blessed" is "cursed." In other words, if the poor are blessed, does that mean the rich are cursed? Luke's version of the beatitudes implies as much. Read Luke 6:20-26. In what sense, if any, is it accurate to say that it is a curse to be:

Rich (opposite of poor)
Happy (opposite of a mourner)
Proud (opposite of meek)

Combative (opposite of peacemaker)
Satisfied with injustice (opposite of hungry for righteousness)
Unfocused on God (opposite of pure in heart)
At ease (opposite of persecuted for righteousness)
Popular (opposite of reviled and falsely accused)

- c. Taken together, the nine Beatitudes (listed in 3.a. above) are meant to describe the ideal character of a follower of Jesus. Which characteristic is most challenge for you to embrace – and why?
- d. Eugene Boring says, "The future tense [found in the second half of each beatitude] resists all notions that Christianity is a 'philosophy of life' designed to make people successful and calm today, in the present moment. Christianity is not a scheme to reduce stress, lose weight, advance in one's career, or preserve one from illness. Christian faith, instead, is a way of living based on the firm and sure hope that meekness is the way of God, that righteousness and peace will finally prevail, and that God's future will be a time of mercy and not cruelty. So, blessed are those who live this life now, even when such a life seems foolish, for they will, in the end, be vindicated by God." What do you think of Boring's perspective?

4. Read Matthew 5:13-16.

- a. Let's think about what Jesus meant when he said we are supposed to be "the salt of the earth." In Jesus time and culture, salt had various functions. Take a look at each function below and discuss what that means for how we should live. For each function, complete this sentence: In Jesus' time, salt was used for _____, which means we should live in a way that _____.

Sacrifice in the temple (Lev. 2:13)
Seasoning (Job 6:6)
Purification (II Kings 2:19)
Preservative
Eating together was called "sharing salt"

- b. What's the meaning of the second thought in verse 13, i.e., the idea that if the salt loses its saltiness, it's useless and gets thrown out? What was Jesus trying to say here?
- c. As best you understand, what does it mean for us to be light in the world?
- d. Can you think of a time when you really saw the light of God in someone else? What happened?
- e. Why is it important for your light to shine? What happens if it doesn't?
- f. Why is it important for our church's light to shine? What happens if it doesn't?