

Blessed, Happy, Content

Stanton Reformed Church

September 22, 2019

Focus: Jesus delivers a sermon to regular folks who faced the regular joy and suffering of human existence; his main message was “you are blessed.”

Function: We are regular folks who face joy and suffering every day; Jesus’ message to us is “we are blessed.”

Every once in awhile I go looking for good news, you know - when I can’t take the nightly news - the constant rotation of stories that create fear and dismay.

And I found a website that tells good news stories. Here’s one from two days ago.

A year ago on September 20, a nurse was driving down the road and she came upon a pretty bad motorcycle accident.

She quickly stopped her car, got out and began helping any way she could.

The scene was filled with serious injuries, disoriented cyclists who were afraid and in need of help from others. And right before them came help.

Help from this stranger who happened to be a nurse.

And in the day of social media, many of the cyclists friended her on facebook.

And the other day, a year later, she mentioned on facebook that her 8 year old daughter was setting up a lemonade stand.

And wouldn't you know it that 30 leather wearing motorcyclists showed up at the lemonade stand.

They were still thankful for the help they received on the day of the accident. They had known despair and helplessness and they were remembering that they received hope and help from a stranger.

Stuff like this happens every day. Sure it doesn't make the regular news but you and me know good people, generous people, kind people...

You and me have been in places in our lives where we faced a variety of needs, hurt, even despair.

You and me have been in a place where we needed hope from others, help from others.

This is the scene that day when Elijah met the widow.

This widow was in despair. She has lost the security of marriage, it appears she was without family to care for her and her son.

Whatever she made at her hourly jobs, with the cost of childcare, she was unable to afford basic provisions.

I imagine she was one of those people whose lives simply was messy. She was probably always in need. She may even have worn down her friends - who tried to help but over time became uncomfortable with her level of need.

There are those in our culture today that we cannot even bear to look at - the homeless on the street. The mother with too many children at the grocery store. The man who looks too disheveled for us to comfortably say hello to.

She was one of those people. People who go unnoticed, uncared for.

I imagine she felt alone. Unwanted.

Her neediness had become doubt. Her doubt had become hopelessness and she was living in despair.

And then she met a stranger.

And this stranger did not look away.

Instead he asked her for help.

And with this encounter, her life turned upside down.

Her story is one that speaks to issues we deal with today.

Did you know that mothers are the primary breadwinners to 50% of families with children under 18?

That is half of white mothers. It increases from there - 53 percent of Latina families, 81 percent of Black families, 67 percent of Native American families and 44 percent of

Asian/Pacific Islander families who have children under 18.

Let's remember that mothers with full-time, year-round jobs are paid 71 cents for every dollar paid to fathers.

This is nearly 15 million households. 3.9 million of those households fall below the poverty level.

Desperation is a real thing for many, many families today.

There is a verse in Proverbs that says, "hope deferred makes the heart sick or weak."

It is people like this - people who are poor, not just physically poor but poor in spirit - that Jesus was talking to that day on the Mountain.

This sermon was delivered out in the open for everyone to hear. It was not delivered in white steeple churches for those dressed in their Sunday best.

It was not delivered to those who had enough money to buy a ticket to see Jesus speak.

No, Jesus was talking to everyday humans who go to work, provide for families, take care of their homes, people who are trying to make it through.

Everyday, real people who faced joy, sadness, doubt, fear... and what was Jesus' message to these folks? You are blessed.

Jesus says, You are blessed. Blessed in this case means happy or even content.

You are content.

Content? But how can we be content if we are in despair?

How can we be content if we doubt? How can we be content if we are messy and needy?

You see contentment is akin to peace. And peace is not an absence of conflict or trouble or even war.

Peace can be a state of mind, a disposition, an internal sense of calm - in the middle of the storms that life throws us.

And so blessed are you, happy are you,
content are you, Jesus says.

Why? Because you have the kingdom of
heaven.

Yes you... you - we who are poor in spirit.

Those of us who doubt, who are uncertain as
to how tomorrow will work itself out.

Those of us who at times lose hope.

Those of us who are messy and needy.

Why? Because when we face doubt, or
hopelessness, or messiness or neediness
we are more apt to realize we cannot go
alone.

If we are honest and sometimes we have to
go to the end of our rope for us to be honest,
if we are honest, we know we need others to
help.

Like the motorcyclists in the accident, like the
widow with no more bread... we need our
neighbors and our friends, and maybe even
strangers to help.

This is a reality check I think.

None of us are secure in our own abilities, our own resources, all of us need one another.

And when we are willing to admit it, we are more open to seeing the kingdom of heaven breaking into our lives.

We are more apt to see the stranger helping us. We are more apt to be open to having a stranger help us.

The Beatitudes turn our way of thinking upside down.

They show us that Jesus simply didn't see the world the way we do.

Blessing, happiness, contentment does not mean having it all together, or being certain of everything we hold dear. Blessing, happiness or contentment does not mean being independent.

Blessing does not mean, happiness does not mean, contentment is not found in

isolation, with our individual beliefs or provisions or a perfectly crafted life.

Instead, those of us who know doubt and messiness, those of us who wonder how tomorrow will work itself out, even those of us who, like the widow, believe we are running out of the stuff to make our daily bread.

It is then that we are blessed, happy, content... why?

Because like the widow, we may be going about our business and right before us comes a stranger, something we were not expecting, and we find out all along, the kingdom of heaven is in front of us.

Might God open our eyes to see, Might God give us courage to speak our truth. Might God bring us strangers who show us the kingdom of heaven.