

Throughout our world, the Church, and our homes, we are hearing the same news; unemployment is going down, but people are still fearing eviction, rising mental health issues, especially in children, because we are still recovering from the isolation of Covid from one another, and though we came through the worst of Covid, we hope, people are still getting Covid which is dangerous for anyone with respiratory, heart or immunocompromised issues. And now we are facing inflation, though, that too, is coming down. I recently saw a Valentine meme on Facebook that showed a jewelry box but instead of a ring or necklace it showed an egg and said “give your loved one the best.”

We are all asking the same question; how do we navigate through this time because we are tired of it, and it is interfering with what we want and our traditional way of life? So, what happens is we have some people plowing through because this has gone on for so long, and some are locked away and afraid, and in the midst of all that we find pain and loss. We are looking for a way to deal with the challenges, the uncertainties, and the difficulties of life, and times have only gotten harder. So how do we move forward?

We bring our personal and worldly struggles before God. Each of us could tell stories about the questions we face, the challenges we confront, and the difficulties we must overcome. Sometimes we seem to succeed and other times we do not.

Most of us, pre-covid, have been taught to navigate the waters of life through power, strength, accomplishment, and acquisition. We work to put something away for a rainy day or, at the least, to be comfortable. We seek ways to grab what we want. We

argue to be right so we can have our way, and there seems to be a lot of arguing these days. We compete to win.

These attitudes fill headline news, TV, and our own lives. They find their origin in the idea that we are to be self-made men and women, that we are to build up ourselves and make a life by not depending upon others, which only serves to isolate us into a “me, myself, and I” way of living. After all, we must look out for number one, because if we don’t, no one will. At least that is what many of us have been told. For too long that has been the myth with which we have lived. Jesus’ life and teaching fly in the face of that myth. Jesus offers a different way of navigating life.

Jesus tells us the waters of life are navigable, but not the way the world tells us which is through power, strength, accomplishment, or acquisition. The way forward is not the way we have always done it. It is not enough for us, as believers and followers of Jesus, to simply make over a little piece of the world or life which is our little piece. Navigating life is not about overcoming circumstances or other people. It is about overcoming ourselves and our instincts which exclude and do not take into account others.

Jesus gives us hints on how to do this through the beatitudes.

- Blessed are the poor in spirit.
- Blessed are those who mourn.
- Blessed are the meek.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- Blessed are the merciful.
- Blessed are the pure in heart.

- Blessed are the peacemakers.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

A lifetime of striving to live the beatitudes day after day, year after year, is how we overcome ourselves.

The beatitudes are not simply Jesus' helpful hints for happy living or the church's prescription to fix the ills of the world. What they are is a description of God's mind and Jesus' heart. They are kingdom values and reveal what kingdom life is like. They shape and form our lives and longings to be like God's life and longings.

Most of the time we twist and distort God's life and longings to fit ours, so the beatitudes sound radical and seem out of reach.

The beatitudes are not about building up, accomplishing, or acquiring. They are about letting go, surrendering, living with an open heart. They are about caring for others because we are inter-connected, they are about mercy and grace. That does not mean we run away, back down, or isolate ourselves from the realities of our life and the world. It means we engage them in a different way; the Jesus' way. The beatitudes teach us to trust God more than the external circumstances of our lives. They invite dependence on God rather than self-reliance.

The world might call that weakness and foolishness. But to those who are being saved it is the power of God. God chose what is foolish to shame the wise and what is weak to shame the strong. The beatitudes are nothing less than the way of the cross.

In the trauma and setbacks of life, and most definitely right now, we discover that we cannot do life by ourselves. As we admit our need of God, we find arrogance and self-sufficiency give way to meekness. We realize that all that we are and have is from God and we begin to know ourselves as poor in spirit. Our own misfortunes awaken and connect us to the pain of the world for which we cannot help but mourn. We have nowhere else to go and so we turn our gaze back to God.

We can do that because we know and trust ourselves to have already been blessed by God. We live the beatitudes as a response to God blessing us. That is the way of Christ. That is not only the way forward through this life, it is the way to life. If we are to follow Christ it must become our way.