

The Reverend Heinz D Raidel
Message Epiphany 4,
January 29, 2023

Please allow me to name the elephant in the room

- I had a knee replacement a few weeks ago
- I know I am not the only one in the room who has had this procedure
- my healing has been a little delayed because I have to take blood thinners which cause inflammation, which makes PT more challenging (so I am struggling a bit with PT and flexion)
- but ya know what? I have received cards and well wishes from so many caring people in my congregations that I cried.
- and my wife is an angel
- and I am of the opinion that despite everything that came with this surgery it is a blessing
- it's a blessing because it is the hope and promise of a better future
- I know in my heart that the medical technology that makes joint replacement possible is proof of blessing and hope from God
 - because like all blessings from God, this promise that the way things are, is not the way things are going to be.
 - this is the promise that things are going to get better.
 - this is God's promise through Jesus.
- this is the same promise in the reading from Matthew today
- and this is the good news for our lives and faith formation today.

I want to share with you two ways of looking at and reading the Gospel for today

- I think we need to consider both ways to see what's going on
- one or both of those ways might make us uncomfortable
- which is Ok because that's where the good news and faith formation is for us.

Real quick, please remember this is written by Matthew, who is

- a scriptural expert
- probably a rabbi who is following Jesus
- and this is written in the Hebraic tradition
- this is part of a much longer sermon
- this section appears to be Jesus speaking to his disciples.

Now, consider what Jesus is actually saying

- blessed are the poor in spirit
- blessed are those who mourn,
- skip ahead here
- blessed are the merciful, the pure in heart, and the peacemakers
- blessed are those who are persecuted for doing the right thing

And consider how that sounds vs the reality of the situation

-because people who are poor in spirit, people who struggle with their faith, they don't seem to be blessed

-I have never known anyone who has had a traumatic life experience which caused them to question their faith to be blessed

-I have never known anyone who is confused and befuddled by scripture to be blessed

-I have never known anyone who has been damaged or can't sleep because they made the mistake of trusting a preacher who thinks God is only interested in a few of us

-also, people who mourn are not blessed

-meaning, people who have lost a loved one or close friend

-they might tell themselves they are Ok and their loved one is in a better place

-but I can assure you it will be a long time before they process their pain and be able to move on

-and I can assure you they will all live with a least a little bit of regret for something they wished they would have done with that person

-mourning is not a blessing

-people who show mercy, people who are pure in heart, and people who are the peacemakers

-are they really blessed?

-because people who show mercy do that because they understand and they feel the full pain of people who need mercy

-people who are pure in heart know the wounds and pains and scars on hearts of the people around them who are not so pure

-and the peacemakers? They sacrifice a little of themselves and their hearts every time they step in to sooth conflict and bring peace to a world of people who usually do not learn from them.

The question then becomes; how do we process this? How do we process the reality of what Jesus calls a blessing with how we feel and what we know?

-I think we can come up with two scenarios

-first one is to try and convince ourselves that we are blessed, when in reality we are hurting and our world or the worlds of people we know and love are falling apart

-this scenario never works

-the second scenario is for us to realize that Jesus' words about blessings

- are first a statement of how we are, and then a promise of how we can and will be.

-in other words, maybe we can see this works the way all Jesus blessings works,

-in that a Jesus blessing is hope and a promise that the way things are is not the way things have to, or will be.

-and through Jesus, things will get better

-when we look at this as hope and promise

-it becomes about what Jesus will do for us

-and it becomes a description of the kingdom of God (heaven)

-it becomes a description of what will be in the future,

-and maybe most importantly it becomes a description of what can be in our own lives here and now.

-trusting a promise from Jesus is no light weight or easy undertaking

-trust in Jesus' promises will not make our pain or brokenness disappear, but trust in Jesus does mean that pain and whatever grip our brokenness or baggage has on our lives will be shattered.

-now hang on because I rewrote this four times and I think it finally might make some sense and if not I will have to go over it again and nobody wants that!

-please try and read these blessings from Jesus with the last of the part of the sentence first

-I mean read it like this: "theirs is the kingdom of heaven, so blessed are those who are poor in spirit"

-because if we take the second part first, and trust the promise that Jesus has given us or called us to the kingdom, (through his sacrifice on the cross)

-that might help us live with whatever poorness or struggles of our own faith and then help others with theirs

-taking the second part first again, we know that there is a room for us and our loved ones in the kingdom Jesus describes,

-so we can live with our mourning and grief and reach out to other folks who are mourning

-we are on a roll here: we know we are promised mercy through Jesus.

-So we can show others mercy without breaking our hearts in the process

-and if I may skip ahead, we know we are children of God

-I mean we are children of God first because we were created somehow by God the Creator

-and we are children of God because God claimed us at our baptisms.

-and followers of Christ, because we are the children of God, we have the power to be the peacemakers.

-and this is the good news and the faith life lesson for us

-we have the power to be the peacemakers

-we can make peace in our own lives first

-and we can help others to find peace

-and we can make peace with our pasts and whatever was there

-and we can make peace in our relationships here and now without losing any part of ourselves

-we can be the peacemakers, success or chances of success just don't matter

-and we can make peace wherever there is conflict, including our places of worship

Now If you will allow me a bit of a personal summary. I don't do this often because I get emotional and I hate that. But this is an exception

-I knew I was not blessed when Dr. Maynard came in and told me that my knee and the inflammation situation just sucked (his words).

-and I knew I was not blessed when he laid some very unpleasant options if we did not improve the situation

-but at some point I realized I was blessed because through the medical technology that (like all good that come from God) there was the hope and then promise that the way I was, was not the way I had to be. There was and is hope through the goodness and love of God that things will get better

-and that's a blessing. From God.

And wherever we are in our lives, whatever situation seems to be holding us back or dragging us down or even breaking our hearts

-those situations are not blessings.

-the blessing is that because God loves us and sent his son for us, we can have faith in the hope and promise that how we are, is not how we have to be

-and that Jesus truly is the promise that things will get better.

Word.

Amen. And peace to us all.