

Micah 6:1-8 Matthew 5:1-12

How long will it take to get it right?

One of my favourite posters from the 70s, shows a mother basset hound, with a pup on each side of her. Each pup has a corner of the mother's long drooping ear in its mouth, and each is pulling outwards. The caption under the picture of an extremely solemn mother hound reads, "How long, O Lord, how long?"



I often wonder if God feels this way about us - after all the coaching God has done to help us realize what makes for the most meaningful, fulfilling lives; to lead us into abundant living. "How long will it take them, to get it right?" - the question of a parent who suffers for the child with every mistake, every hurt, every life that is less than it could be.

This morning, we have a series of teachings on how to live a life that is blessed. My plan is to offer a series of short paragraphs on each of the teachings we have in this passage, but before I begin, consider this. "It was God who made us, and not we ourselves." [Psalm 100:3] Just maybe, God knows, ultimately, what is better for us than anyone else. Just maybe, God's ways will lead us into a richer life than we could ever find on our own.

on poverty of spirit ...

To knowing that we do not open ourselves to the spirit of God, enough ...

A lady wrote her church a letter. She had been in Sunday school since age ten, had been married in the church, her sons baptized in the church, and she had worked on church committees and taught Sunday school. She might have thought that she had done quite enough for the church, but instead she wrote: "My account seems to be overdrawn. I deposited myself; I withdrew a way of life. I deposited my wedding vows; withdrew a wonderful and satisfying marriage. I deposited my sons for baptism; withdrew all the joys and blessings of motherhood. I deposited time; withdrew the friendship of young and old. I deposited money -- that's a touchy subject. What did I get for my money?"

"A beautiful building, yes, but more than that, an investment in the children and young adults of our church. A place to worship, a place to meet friends, old and new. A place where I feel good deep within, knowing I am doing right.

"A minister - ... who baptizes our children, marries our young, visits our sick, and comforts the bereaved, in addition to the other formal duties of the church? ...

"I know of no other organization where I am free to decide how little I want to deposit in it and still feel free to withdraw as much as I need. I will try in the future to make greater deposits, but please don't count on my being able to balance my account. I know I'll always be overdrawn."

on mourning ...

To have a heart that can feel with another their pain is to have a heart that can sing with one's own joy and the joy of those around us. A heart that will break, is a heart that is open to God's healing. If we so steel our hearts that nothing can impale them, then they are steeled against God and all of humanity and joy as well. Through mourning, God draws us near to Himself and teaches us anew to lean on Him and to know His love for our lives.

on meekness ...

Meekness often suggests spinelessness, softheartedness, and timidity. A youngster,

whose mother called him her little lamb, said one day, "Don't call me your little lamb. Call me your tiger!" ... A twenty-first century beatitude might read: "Blessed are the bombastic, for they will be heard for their much speaking, Blessed are the pushers, for they will bulldoze their way ahead of all others,"

Meekness was practised and commended by Jesus, who said that the earth would belong to the humble, patient, even-tempered, and long-suffering.

Sometimes, meekness is described, as it is in Micah, as walking humbly -

on walking humbly ...

Literally, it means to "bow low". It implies deep reverence for and fellowship with God. It involves making a choice, choosing God, being filled with a sense of God's presence, depending utterly on God, and taking God's sympathy for the world and for every one of God's created into our own hearts, feeling it there, and living out that sympathy.

on hunger ...

Most have hunger for riches. But the one who works for daily wages envies the one who is on a salary. Then one day s/he is on salary, and the longing turns to an inheritance or lottery winning - IF ONLY - becomes central to the thinking. If only I could become a millionaire. And the hunger goes on. As someone has said, reaching for material goods is like drinking sea water filled with salt. Only one hunger can be fully satisfied - the hunger for God and God's will.

hunger for righteousness ...

For what is right - a right relationship between me and God, between me and another and within myself. Righteousness has to do with love, and with mercy. Loving God, one another and one's self. Love is such a vital ingredient in living that we can scarcely do anything without it.

on love ...

A man and his wife were at an orphanage where they hoped to adopt a child. One boy appealed to them in particular. After they explained to the small child the many things they would give him, he said: "If you have nothing to offer except a good home, clothes, toys and the other stuff most kids have - I would just as soon stay here." The woman asked what on earth he could possibly want besides what they offered, to which the boy replied, "I want someone to love me."

on peace ...

In Hebrew, peace is never only a negative state; it never means only the absence of trouble; in Hebrew, peace always means everything which makes for one's highest good. This peace does not come from avoiding issues; it comes from facing them, dealing with them and conquering them. "Blessed are the peacemakers" does not bless us for passively accepting things because we are afraid of the trouble of doing anything about them, but for actively facing things, and making peace, even when the way to that peace is through struggle.

And it is never enough to acquire peace for ourselves. It must be shared. You'll note that the beatitude does not promise happiness to the person who possesses peace; but rather to the peacemaker.

on persecution ...

When one stands up for what one believes in, one may have to pay the price. We have only to look at the prophets, or at the disciples, or in recent years, at ones like Martin Luther King Jr., or those who protest their government; anyone who champions the rights of the poor and powerless, the immigrant and the refugee.

on justice and mercy ...

William Temple pointed out that justice is too often dealing with people according to what they deserve. "The Gospel would have us deal with people according to their needs." What did we deserve when Jesus died for us?

on happiness ...

It is having a humble (Matt. 5:3), sensitive(5:4), controlled(5:5), hungry(5:6), compassionate(5:7), clean(5:8), peaceful (5:9), and determined(5:10) heart.

It is a matter of being alive to what God has given us. Jesus had a supreme happiness because every day was a new gift from God. Everything and everybody in his world - his everyday world - delighted him.