

Blest Are They



This hymn echoes the words of Jesus as he began the Sermon on the Mount as recorded by Matthew. Prior to this moment, Jesus had been busy calling his disciples and juggling crowds. We find him up to his elbows in crowds of the sick, suffering, disturbed and demon possessed. They flock to him because he heals them, and they follow him wherever he goes.

It was in the midst of such a crowd that Jesus, taking stock of what is happening around him, heads up on the mount and calls his disciples to him. Rising above the pressing crowd who seek to be close to him, Jesus begins to tell the disciples and all those within ear shot what it looks like to follow him and live into his kingdom.

He begins with some congratulations. The hymn and the scripture passage use the word “blessed,” which we can also translate “happy.” It’s quite the roll call...the impoverished in spirit, those who mourn, those who are gentle and powerless, those who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness, those who make peace, those who are merciful. These are not the kind of folks that the world rushes to pat on the back in celebration of their good fortune in life!

Imagine how his hearers reacted to such statements. This was not the kingdom they had imagined, this was a kingdom in direct contrast to their well known kingdoms that affirmed and celebrated the strong, the powerful, the conquering. This kingdom of Jesus turned all other kingdoms on their heads. It was unheard of!

Imagine how his hearers reacted to such statements when they heard something that sounded very close to a description of their lives. The sick were there: what kind of sorrow—of mourning—came with their sickness or the sickness of a loved one? The desperate and destitute were there, some on their last attempt to receive help. Some were so poor in spirit that they were having to drum up the courage just to hope. Others came to hear Jesus because they were longing for the right way of life—longing so deeply that they felt it as one would experience a hunger pang or a longing for water. The powerless, the lowly, the outcast flocked to Jesus. As Jesus called out these characteristics, his listeners didn’t have to let their eyes wander far before they encountered a real life example. Some did not have to look beyond their own wide-eyed reflection. Can you imagine them beginning to glance at one another mouthing “me?!”

“Congratulations,” Jesus proclaimed then and we sing today, “yours is the Kingdom of God.” Jesus came to include the ones who were uninvited and excluded from the world’s kingdoms. They are welcomed to his way of life where they can find God, home, consolation, a place to stand and to be seen, and family. The kingdom of God belongs to them!

Perhaps when you sing this hymn with your congregation, your eyes will encounter prime examples of those to whom Jesus extends the kingdom of God. Perhaps you will find yourself to be an example. “Rejoice and be glad! Yours is the kingdom of God.” Welcome to the upside-down Kingdom of God.

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