

**Message**  
**October 10-11, 2009**  
**Romans 12:2-9; Matthew 5:1-10**  
**Kingdom Living for Kingdom People**  
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**There are a lot of wise sayings:**

“Small opportunities are often the beginning of great enterprises.”- W. Clement Stone

"Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value."- Albert Einstein

“The chief danger in life is that we take too many precautions.” Alfred Adler

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. Ecclesiastes 3:1

Happy are those who trust in the Lord. Proverbs 16:20

For humans it is impossible, but for God all things are possible. Matthew 19:26

Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:44

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Matthew 7:12

This is how Jesus teaches, with wise sayings; carefully chosen words meant to be memorized. Today’s lesson, one of Jesus’ five sermons from the gospel of Matthew, the teaching gospel, is from the Sermon on the Mount; what St. Augustine terms as our book of Christian ethics. This message is about new order, new rule with the one who comes to save, Jesus, the Messiah. The message opens with Jesus ascending the mountaintop, a familiar scene for the faithful recollecting Moses ascending the mountaintop to receive the law. With Jesus, the law is fulfilled, and a new kingdom is upon us and emerging. He legislates a new order with wise sayings, “You are the light for the world; You are the salt for the earth. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Ask, and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock and the door will be opened.”

On the mountain side huge crowds are drawing near. Jesus’ disciples come forward and he sits down to teach. A rabbi, when he’s about to get serious with his students, takes a seat. This is teaching with authority; and probably it’s over a long period of time with some intensity. Remember the Sermon on the Mount contains about 107 verses. The King James Version tells us Jesus, *opened his mouth*; words used to signify a public address, something profound. In other words, we’d better listen up. Jesus is getting ready to make a declaration that as followers of Christ, as a Christian community, our world just has a joyfully, different look. First, though, he prefaces his ethical teaching with what one author calls “*comforting felicitations*”, paradoxical statements that reveal visible alternatives to this world resulting in blessed happiness; the beatitudes.

Beatitudes are affirmations, pronouncements that assure blessings upon those who share the characteristic of the beatitude; not hopes or prophecies. They're congratulations for what is. A beatitude is a declaration of good fortune, privilege, happiness; what one scholar says is Jesus' Magna Carta for the Church or, the charter of liberties for our kingdom living.

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, tells us that this kingdom living is about not being conformed to this world but being transformed by what God does for us. This past summer about 100 youth and some adults spent a great 5 days at Student Life Camp in Pennsylvania. We learned a lot about what it means to live a life, flipped, flipped from our conventional world to kingdom living. We had to do some things; leave behind cell phones, ipods, and personal agendas; we had to share bravely and honestly, sing too loud in worship and give our all to the Christ within us. And we flipped; learning that with Jesus, the last will be first and the first will be last. So, I dare us to live in this radical world of Jesus where he tells us, happy are the poor, privileged are those who mourn, blessed are the meek, and favored are those who hunger and thirst; to embrace attitudes that tell us about behavior that doesn't conform to the contemporary world. Behavior where we come so to understand the power of God's love, that we're changed from the inside out, and we can't help but shout for joy.

So, here we go with 8 reasons for living the flipped around, kingdom life.

First Jesus says, blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. In Luke's gospel, he says, "blessed are the poor. Blessed are those who live in economic poverty. Today, I think Jesus would say, blessed are those who struggle to find security in gainful, purposeful employment. In Matthew's gospel Jesus includes the poverty stricken, *and* those who are poor in spirit. Those who are at the end of their rope; those who question and doubt their ability. Those who finally come to accept such a poverty in their mind, that they cease to envy those who have and stop rebelling because *they* have not. Jesus says, these are the privileged, fortunate, because with less, there is more of God and his rule. The kingdom is theirs. Not the human kingdom. But the kingdom in which Jesus lives, a reversal kingdom, a flipped kingdom where those on the bottom of the heap are now on the mountain top.

Jesus continues. Blessed are those who are sad, they shall be comforted, Jesus promises. God's favor is with those of us who suffer because of the injustice in the world; those who grieve. God finds favor for those whose life is just a disaster right now. All will be well. This will not last indefinitely. Let comfort be our vehicle for strength and courage.

Jesus goes on to paint a flipped kingdom picture: blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth; those who feel powerless, who don't throw their weight around. Jesus gives praises for those who yield to anger, aggression and conquest, those who practice self-control, those who know all too well their own ignorance and weakness only to bow down in deep humility.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Those who, with their whole heart, crave to live as God calls us to live, to right wrongs; those whose appetite is for all to reveal the *inextinguishable* goodness God places in each of us. Several years ago Freddie and I had the privilege of seeing Archbishop Desmond Tutu when he was in Richmond. He talked about his travels across the globe and especially the horror and shame he witnesses in war torn, oppressed lands. Bishop Tutu is a beatituder, dedicating his life serving as an agent for equality and peace, because he believes, and these are his words, that in God, we all have an instinct for goodness. God is our very food and drink that feeds us with such goodness.

Blessed are the merciful for they will receive mercy. Jesus is asking us to put on a different set of lenses. Look with another's point of view and see without criticism, even to forgive. In our caring, we find ourselves cared for.

Happy are those who are pure within, says Jesus. Katharos is the Greek word for pure, which means, clean, like a fresh load of laundry; or those who are purged of whatever brings discontent; those with unaltered motives. The impure aren't those who have been victimized by life's conditions: the Samaritan woman, the leper, the prostitute, the tax collector, the unemployed, the hurting, the shameful and sorrowful. Jesus reminds us, "what a person takes into his mouth does not make him unclean. What comes out of his mouth – that's what can make him unclean." Happy are those who can get our inside world put right and serve with selfless motives.

Peacemakers, says Jesus, are those most precious who go about seeking reconciliation. Letting go of revenge and retribution, peacemakers want to cooperate, and bring together those who don't see eye to eye. Peacemakers recognize that they may well serve powerless but with a commitment and conviction that as God's children, they are the hands and feet of God the peacemaker.

Now we come to beatitude number 8. The kingdom of God is these people who run after, seek out, strive for, under any conditions, a relationship with Jesus Christ. The persecuted, who celebrate and know joy in their willingness to stand firm for what is just and right in Jesus Christ. These faithful beatituders, they are well past looking after their own needs. They know their identity in kingdom living as servants for Christ.

This is our world, the kingdom of God. Kingdom people are a crazy, flipped around group of happy people, sad, joy-filled, poor, fortunate, yielding, blessed, craving, reconciling, privileged, self-sacrificing, cheerful, powerless, completely dependent upon the one true Lord, God in Christ. He chooses us to be his kingdom people, to fix our attention on God. As the kingdom, we have purpose and meaning. The apostle tells us that we're fashioned and excellently formed as the parts of Christ's body, the church, the ekklesia, the assembly of Christ called to use our most blessed gifts and invite others into the kingdom, and say, come, welcome, join us in this kingdom.

Author Parker Palmer reminds us that "our lives are governed by rules...rules that flow from the assumptions we make about life...about 'how things are', and what we can

expect.” (Palmer, The Promise of Paradox p. 95). Palmer goes on to teach that for some we assume a world of scarcity. We believe we’ll run out of things; that energy sources will dwindle, that cash reserves will diminish; that basic needs may be threatened; and for some this is truly a reality. Food, shelter and clothing needs are not met. So, we may, in our assumption of scarcity, gather what we can for safe keeping, worried that someday there may not be enough. We cling to the goods of the world and maybe, just maybe sometimes we grasp more than we need. We consume. But, what if instead, we flipped and lived as true kingdom lovers, not in a world of perceived scarcity. Instead, we live a transformed life of abundance.

When we are poor, meek, mournful, hungry and thirsty for God, we find the true abundance of God’s grace and mercy. We are those who are not about securing wealth but instead, as kingdom lovers, we’re willing to share our resources. In so doing, there’s enough for everyone and we celebrate! This is the life of kingdom lovers, the church.

Over these next weeks we’ll be talking more and more about how best to share our abundance and on October 24-25, we’ll all be invited to make a commitment to our kingdom life, here, now, with Jesus, through our financial resources with Christ Church. These are challenging times and I imagine for most of us, we didn’t expect these times to still be so challenging.

It’s now more than ever we that we seek the kingdom of Jesus Christ, promised for us in this time and in the time to come; a kingdom of us, the fortunate, the blessed, the privileged and promised; a kingdom people who happily and joyfully come to realize that our world is God’s world; a kingdom where we are ruled by a Lord who embraces us with such abundance and such love that we can’t help but shout with gladness at his grace in our lives. A world where we surrender to our God and be what we are made to be; a world where God asks us to share in our gifts serving with generous hearts giving to the kingdom of Christ with all that we have, and all that we are, our resources; resources not of scarcity but resources of abundance of mercy, purity, peace and righteousness. We are God’s most blessed, and ours is the most glorious kingdom of God. Rejoice and be glad in it.