

Faith Presbyterian Church

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Aerobics of Discipleship

Matthew 5:1-12

1 When Jesus[a] saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

9 “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

10 “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely[b] on my account.

12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I was just in Washington with my family and we went to a little Amusement park called Remlinger Farms. At every corner there was a “your face here” cutout board where you stick your head into a hole and someone takes a picture of your face attached to a much different body, or entirely different thing - in our case a flower stem. It’s funny because the body doesn’t match the head.

It's funny in that case, but when it comes to the Body of Christ, which is another word for the church or the people of God, and it's relationship with our Head, which is another word for Christ, then it's not really a funny matter. When the body doesn't match the Head it's a life and death, flourishing or perishing matter. And not just for the church, His Body, but for the whole world. The body is suppose to match the head.

These Blessings Jesus spoke (or Beattitudes) have been titled/called many things. Recently, I came across an incredibly helpful Title for the them offered by Dale Brunner; who by God's awesome planning is the retreat speaker up at Tahoe. So you all are getting a taste of what Dale is teaching the rest of the congregation this weekend. He calls them the Aerobics of Discipleship. Discipleship being the ins and outs, the character of following Jesus for the sake of the world. He suggests the first 4 blessings as the Aerobics of being on our knees in faith, the 5th, 6th and 7th as the Aerobics of being on our feet in love and the 8th and 9th as the aerobics of being on our back in persecution or suffering. Or Knees as Helpless, Feet as Helpful and Back as Hurt. When he introduces this to his students he actually has them practice these Aerobics, so if we're all up for it at the end I may have us practice these Aerobics. But for now, just imagine stick figures in this Aerobic positions.

Often I have read these Beattitudes and felt guilt. For the most part they were a list of oughts, from the Lord of which I was miserably failing to achieve. Despite knowing "Jesus loves me" I heard Jesus the negative motivator and I the disappointing disciple. But hearing them as the Aerobics of Discipleship I am coming to hear our Lord, Savior and Brother who is convincing us that we are His Body. He is giving all who are listening a vision of what the body of Christ is to look like, showing us muscles we don't even know exist and giving us moves to tone them. He would say, you are my body, Here is what I see, what I intend, what I am doing...he is opening us to God's world first so that we can rightly see ourselves in it...press forward to it and practice it even when it is uncomfortable.

In these aerobics of discipleship the intention is to have the body match the Head - Jesus Christ so that all might flourish!

When I was in seminary I played basketball twice a week. After hours of thinking, studying, sitting, listening, sitting, carrying heavy bags and thoughts, and more sitting running, jumping and sweating on the court felt great. What didn't feel so great was the day I got blocked on a drive to the hoop and slammed down on my right hip which threw my lower back out. I went to physical therapy soon after because I wasn't recovering. And what ensued was months of work to strengthen my muscles to hold my hip in right alignment with my hip sockets and my vertebrae one with another. My PT would warm my muscles to make them supple, would align them and then being aligned would send me home with

very particular exercises to teach my muscles to do what they were meant to do, what they could do. Then they would fatigue and I would do it again. As time passed I grew stronger and my muscles did what my PT knew they could do with practice.

We, the Body of Christ, get wacked out of alignment with our Head, Jesus.

What does that mean? Paul puts it this way in his letter to the Colossians

He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16 for in[h] him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him.17 He himself is before all things, and in[i] him all things hold together. 18 He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. Col 1: 15-19

In Jesus Christ we see God, we see what we as humans were created to be, we see the source of all that is, we are face to face with the glue of life, we are with the beginning who is to be in the first place. And we see that we are not God but rather God's beloved, we are not the source of life but given life, we can't hold things together but are held together, we are not the beginning but the following, we are not the first place not the Head but the body. But, more often than not, we think we are the source of life, the glue that holds things together, the beginning. And when we think this way, when we think we are the Head or let other ways and people and things be in first place then we, the Body of Christ, are thrown out of wack with our Head.

God knows this and sends the Son, Jesus, our Great Physician to show us what the Body of Christ is to look like in his life, to make us right in his death, and to realign us over and over again in his sending of the Holy Spirit. In these aerobics of discipleship Jesus intention is to realign us, to have the body match the Head so that all our movement serves the flouring of the whole world.

Now, when we are aligned with the Head we are out of wack with the way of this world. that why Christians are often called Wackos. When we put Jesus first, when we follow his commands we may not be called blessed or feel happy. I have heard it said that "[Jesus] is declaring not what [we] may feel like (blessed/happy) but what God thinks of us [what he sees in us and what he is working in us] and what on that account we [truly] are: we are blessed"

I want to share with you my rewrite of Jesus Beattitudes (or blessings) through the lens of the Aerobics of Discipleship. I prayerfully and imaginatively translated his 9 blessings from Be Attitudes (which I have

wrongly heard as oughts) to aerobic postures. I did this to both capture Jesus intention to encourage us and to free my mind from mislead assumptions into new life giving understanding.

I want you to imagine that we have ascended from the valley of work, anxiety, pursuit, illness, making ends meet and ladder climbing to the Mount where Jesus sat. You join the crowds tired, maybe anxious, definitely pressed by the valley life and filled with anticipation as you take a seated posture and Jesus begins to teach.

He leans in and says do you see what I see? Do you see what I see when I look at you? Do you see what I see for our future? Do you see what I see of your purpose, of your ability? Do you see what I see? Let me show you.

Then he asks you to lean forward and come upon your knees. In this position of need, vulnerable to predators, low near the earth and humbled Jesus speaks the first 4 blessings;

I see that you need me and you want me. You don't have it all figured out and you can't carry the weight of the world on your shoulders. When you admit this you find that I am with you and you are with me - Blessed.

I see your heart breaking over the things that break God's heart. You need not bear it alone, nor break into pieces, nor believe you are forsaken. You are held together by my love. - Blessed

I see you firmly rooted forever when you relinquish privilege for the sake of another, empower the powerless and deny the urgency of the devil for the voice of the Lord. When yoked to christ in all matters of this life you tread the eternal life now. - Blessed

I see desperation for justice, an aching for right, a longing for the saving messiah. When you thirst for Good know that I am good, and I am God and it will come. - Blessed

As he talks you feel your knees ache, your arms extended up asking for relief, you may want to get up or lay down. And Jesus subtext here is;

Go there, be there, don't get up in fear or lay down in defeat, for it is blessed. On your knees you are in the grip of Grace! On your knees you are connected to God and picked up placed on your feet.

Then Jesus comes around, and picks you up upon your feet. In this position of Fullness (being full of Grace), uplifted, freed and ready to move Jesus speaks the next 3 blessings;

I see you understanding the mercy extended to you in your desperation and need and I see you able to stand under others to support and empathize. - Blessed

I see you clear at center, sober from all that numbs, open and intimate with the indwelling Spirit, quieted by your belovedness. you have eyes to see God's work now and will recognize Jesus when he comes again. - Blessed

I see you making community as you were brought into communion with us - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Where there is hatred sowing love, where there is injury pardon and where there is discord seeking union. - Blessed

As he talks your arms extend out to your neighbor, your feet are readied to go, your Spirit is willing and Jesus subtext here is;

Go there, be there, I'm sending you out to pick others up just as you were picked up. You are blessed to be a blessing. On your feet, hands extended you are Filled with Grace! On your feet you are connected to God and will be thrown down just like me.

Then Jesus extends his arms reaching to the east and the west and asks you to lie on your back. In this position of subjugation, thrown down, face up, a posture of death Jesus speaks the 8th Blessing;

I see your suffering, how the good you extend earns you a slap on the cheek or worse. I'm not surprised that this way of life is judged by most as foreign, freaky and frail; you are not lost or wrong when saying no to hate, pride & shame; and I see that in your heart of hearts you know this to be true even when under attack. - Blessed

Then somehow he makes eye contact with every person in the crowd, as tears soak the ground, heartbeats pound and limbs quiver in anger, and he pronounces;

I see you, I know you, I feel you. This Hurt that you endure is not ok. There is trouble from which you will suffer. This is not your home. And I see that you know this, your tears, your hurt, your anger are all signs that you were made for more than this world can offer. I see you in my Kingdom which is here taking shape in you, but it is yet to come. You are not the only ones who have known this. Others have

come before you and others will come after. And I have come to bear this hurt once and for all. -
Blessed

With these words you find yourself prompted to be upon your knees again. And Jesus begins a chant;

Knees, Feet and Back. Knees, Feet and Back. These are the aerobics of discipleship; Helpless, Helpful and Hurt. Helpless, Helpful and Hurt. This is who you are, this is what I am helping you to be, and this is who your neighbor needs you to be.

Jesus finished teaching and the crowds were amazed.

Today, my question for us is, do we see what Jesus sees? He is giving all who are listening a vision of what the body of Christ is to look like, showing us muscles we don't even know exist and giving us moves to tone them. He says, you are my body, Here is what I see, what I intend, what I am doing...he is opening us to God's world first so that we can rightly see ourselves in it...press forward to it and practice it even when it is uncomfortable.

Why? why engage in these aerobics? Why accept this vision?

Well, it's not because it's easy. It's because it's good for you and it's good for all. You will be a living piece of heaven, moving and flexing towards the flourishing of not only the Body of Christ but of all people in Sacramento, California and beyond.

So, whenever you find yourself in need, helpless, drop to your knees with Jesus - be there, blessed.

Whenever you are strengthened by grace, on your feet ready to be helpful, with Jesus - be there blessed.

Whenever you are thrown down, unthanked, hurt, with Jesus - be there, blessed.

This pattern of Knees, Feet and Back of Helpless, Helpful and Hurt is not only the aerobics of our life but the strength of our work in this world.

Julian Michaels one of the trainers from the Biggest Loser has a famous saying that she yells out to her athletes in the middle of her intense workouts; "Get comfortable with being uncomfortable."

She says that because she knows they can do it, she knows what their bodies are capable of doing, and that they were made to have a healthy body.

Jesus knows what His Body is made to do. He knows even exactly what your body - heart, mind, soul and strength - can do and was made to do. Jesus, from the Mount and in the valley says, with complete confidence and conviction. You are blessed to be a blessing.

Will you dare to see what he sees?

- Next Step Questions

1. Have you ever gotten your physical body wacked out of alignment? Share your experience of getting unaligned and realigned. Can you see any metaphors from your physical un-alignment and realignment that shed light on humanities (or your personal) relationship with God?
2. Why is the Body of Christ suppose to match the Head (Jesus Christ)? What do you think that means and looks like? And why is it important for the church (believers) and the world (everyone believer or non)?
3. Recount the Aerobics of Discipleship and your understanding of them. Do you find yourself participating in these Aerobics of Discipleship? If so, where do you find yourself in them today? If not, what intrigues or repulses you about them?
4. Can you imagine or take a guess as to why "the Aerobics of Discipleship is the strength of our work in this world as Christians", as Quinn suggested? Do you agree?
5. Is there a "move" in the Aerobics of Discipleship you sense God is asking you to do that seems impossible, uncomfortable or unreasonable? Does that make you wonder if God would ask you to do something impossible, uncomfortable or unreasonable? How can your Life Group encourage, pray for or support you?
6. Read the Beattitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) out loud. As you listen be aware of how you hear them. Do you hear invitation, description, judgement, guilt, happy? Do you think you "should" make yourself be those "attitudes"? If so how would you go about making yourself blessed? Read Matthew 5:1-12 out loud. As you listen think of them less as attitudes and more as "postures" or movements. Does this change how you hear them?
7. Fredrick Dale Bruner says that in the opening words of the Sermon on the Mount " Jesus is declaring not what {we} may feel like (blessed) but what God thinks of us and what on that account we are: we are blessed." What do you think blessed means? How does or doesn't Jesus understanding of blessed

line up or stand against your understanding? Is Jesus "wacked out" for believing this about you or is he on to something that you wish you could get on board with too?