

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

Texts: Matthew 5:5 Psalm 37:1-11

LHUMC 3/2/14

Beatitudes Series #4

- I. Introduction
 - A. A question to ponder (and maybe if you are reading ahead on the Beatitudes, you've already pondered it) When I say the word "meek", what or who comes to mind? (A doormat, perhaps?)
 - B. This cartoon offers the traditional view of meekness.
 - C. As I've pondered the question, and more importantly as I've started to figure out what Jesus means by "meekness" there are some people that come to mind that probably wouldn't have been on my list before I started looking at what it means to be meek from Jesus' perspective. If I'm looking at the question through Jesus' eyes:
 1. I think of some of the great Civil Rights activists.
 - a) Rosa Parks, who chose the simple act of sitting in a front seat of a bus and suffered the consequences.
 - b) Martin Luther King, Jr., who preached a message of non-violence in the face of violence, who allowed himself to be arrested time and time again, who stood with thousands of others in front of water cannons and police dogs, knowing that eventually their time would come.
 2. I think of Mahatma Gandhi, who led India to independence through non-violence. He is the one who said, "an eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind." Only someone who knew about meekness could have said that.
 3. I was reading an article this week that caught my eye because it was entitled "Meekness in the Military". It was a story told by General Peter Pace, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff about an experience he had years ago in the Vietnam war: "There was an event in Vietnam where I almost made a very serious mistake. We had been on a patrol, and a young Marine...was killed by a sniper. The bullet came from a nearby village. I was the platoon leader, and he was my machinegun squad leader. I was enraged, and I called in an artillery strike to get the sniper. Then I looked to my right and saw 21-year-old Sergeant Reid Zachary. He did not say a thing, but he simply looked at me, and I knew

what I was about to do was wrong. I called off the military strike and we swept the village, as I should have done in the first place. We found nothing but women and children, as the sniper was long gone. I don't know that I could have lived with myself had I done what I originally planned to do...After the event, I called my platoon together in a little bombed out crater, and I apologized to them. I told them had it not been for Sergeant Zachary, I probably would not have made the right decision. The reaction of the platoon was amazing. It was a very warm, family response, and I learned that a leader admitting mistakes, and thanking those who point them out to him or her, is really important.”
(quoted at www.theologyofwork.org)

“Meek” and “Military” are not terms we would think go together.

4. And then I remember this picture (man in front of tank in Tianmen square)
 5. And I also remember the Bible, where there are a couple of notable examples.
 - a) The first being Moses, about whom is said in the KJV in Numbers 12:3, “was very meek, above all the men who were on the face of the earth.” At first, that doesn't make sense, (we picture Moses as Charlton Heston smashing stone tablets on the ground when we think of Moses) until you remember that he more than once tried to shun God's call because he didn't think he spoke well in front of others.
 - b) And then there's Jesus, who says at one point later in Matthew, “take my yoke upon you, for I am gentle and humble in heart.” The Greek word there for “gentle and humble” is the same one translated as “meek” in today's Beatitude.
- II. So you get the picture that to be meek in a Biblical sense, means anything but being a doormat. Jesus wasn't, Moses wasn't, and nor were the others on my list. In fact, these are all examples of people who not just inherited the earth, but changed it in real and lasting ways. They really would disagree with that cartoon that suggests when the meek inherit the earth, those evil aliens would be able to do whatever they want. Given this list of people, I don't think so! So what are some qualities of the meek who are so blessed by God, given Jesus' understanding of that word? A few come to mind:
- A. Patience is one.

1. And this is not just patience over small issues, like waiting for your car to warm up in the morning. (and don't you hate that).
 2. This is patience in the face of water cannons and police dogs, in the face of evil forces, because you know that eventually, things will be made right.
 3. Martin Luther King said, "Free at last, free at last, thank God almighty we're free at last". And he said it at a time when his people definitely weren't free—not yet. But he knew that if they were patient, things would eventually be made right.
 4. Erik Kolbell describes it like this: "In meekness, the water of patience grinds down the granite hatred of our enemy." (*What Jesus Meant*, p. 65)
 5. When you refuse to give in to hatred, that is the kind of patience that can change the world.
- B. Humility is another.
1. A sign of meekness is that what we do for God and for others is never about us.
 2. Another commentator says this: "Meek people see themselves as servants of God, not thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think. To be meek is to accept our strengths and limitations for what they truly are, instead of constantly trying to portray ourselves in the best possible light."
 3. To be meek means not to be a doormat in our humility, but to use whatever gifts and whatever power gained through those gifts, not to inflate our own egos, but for the good of everyone.
 4. To be meek is to live out the most simple and direct definition of humility, which is when we serve others and God instead of being self-serving.
- C. And then determination would be another.
1. The dictionary defines determination as "the act of settling on a cause or purpose."
 2. The best Biblical definition I've found is actually a description, where it says Luke 9 that Jesus "set his face toward Jerusalem."
 3. In other words, he "set his face" toward what he knew was going to happen to him there.
 4. And when he "set his face", he was showing us that he was not going to be distracted or waylaid in carrying out his Father's purpose for his life.

5. And when he “set his face” at that point in his life, he was showing us what his kind of meekness really is.
6. The question for us becomes “Are we willing to have that kind of determination, are we willing to set our face toward those causes that we believe in, even when we know what might happen to us as we do?” Are we willing to be that of meek?

III. Conclusion

- A. And then, as in all the Beatitudes, comes the promise. As we live out our patience, our humility, and our determination—as we are meek in the face of those forces that push back against us, we are blessed. And even more than that—Jesus says we will inherit the earth.
 1. In other words, Jesus is reminding us that this kingdom that he keeps promising us isn’t just up there, it’s also down here, on earth.
 2. Erik Kolbell defines “inheriting the earth” as “wrestling a piece of creation that has been ceded to the demons and reclaiming it for God.”
 3. And as Jesus says, if we are willing to be his kind of meek, that is what will happen--we will reclaim for God those pieces of creation that matter to us—in our communities, in the systems that we are part of, and in our world.
 4. In the meantime, be patient, be humble, be determined.
 5. Look around you with new eyes for those examples of people who have figured this Beatitude out, and who are patiently waiting for the blessing that comes when they will finally inherit the earth.
 6. And then, following their example, set your face toward wherever Jerusalem is for you—those places or situations or relationships where you haven’t maybe wanted to go because you know what you’ll have to go through on the journey.
 7. But know that as you live out that kind of meekness, you are blessed.
 8. Thanks be to God for the gift of meekness.