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Houghton Lake United Methodist Church

Descending to Joy

Matthew 5:5 and Zechariah 9:1-15

Pastor Tom Anderson

We have been meditating together on Matthew 5:1-12, the Beatitudes—“the beautiful attitudes”—through which Jesus teaches us about happiness and living a blessed life. Blessed are the poor in spirit: through this we learned that happiness comes when I confess I need help and I can’t do it alone. Blessed are those who mourn—through this beatitude we learned that happiness comes not in trying to escape sorrow but in bearing it. Today it is “Blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth.”

In the pagan world all around us, meekness is considered a negative. It is a sign of weakness. The pagans have insults for the meek: they are doormats, wimps, and weaklings. The pagan world around us has a perverted beatitude: blessed are the aggressive, the hot-heads and those always look out for themselves. But what is meekness? We ought not to let the world define it for us. We ought to look to Jesus himself, for he is the very definition of meekness and he was the most profoundly happy man who ever walked the earth.

Jesus’ display of meekness began at Christmas. The Bible says, “Jesus, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness...he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.” (Philippians 2:6-7) Meekness is the strength to give up power, status, and prestige in order to do the will of God.

Zechariah the prophet lived and ministered between 520 and 480 BC. He lived at a very difficult moment in the history of Israel. The exiles had returned from nearly 70 years in Babylon. They were poor, struggling and discouraged. God gave to Zechariah a magnificent prophecy of the coming of the Messiah-king to encourage the people and build them up in hope. The vision was not a powerful military ruler riding in on a war horse but a meek and humble prince of peace who would enter the capital on a humble beast of burden—a donkey. This Messiah would bring peace and prosperity to Israel

without military force. Five hundred years later this prophecy came to pass and we read this passage in church every Palm Sunday: “See your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle (meek) and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey...” (Zechariah 9:9)

Jesus invites us to learn meekness from him: “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle (meek) and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29)

The acronym M.E.E.K can be used this morning to sum up Jesus’ teachings on meekness.

“M” stands for the phrase *my self is third*. Do you have the strength to put yourself third in life behind Jesus first; others second and then you third? That’s Jesus, others, you or J.O.Y. Jesus said, “Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant...” You don’t work your way up to joy but you descend to joy by becoming a servant who puts himself third.

Taylor University is a Christian college in Indiana. Years ago, they were pleased to learn that an African student, Sam, was going to be enrolling in their school. This was before it was commonplace for international students to come to the U.S. to study. He was a bright young man with great promise, and the school felt honored to have him. When he arrived on campus, the President of the University took him on a tour, showing him all the dorms. When the tour was over, the President asked Sam where he would like to live. The young man replied, "If there is a room that no one wants, give that room to me." The President turned away in tears. Over the years he had welcomed thousands of Christian men and women to the campus, and none had ever made such a request.

"If there is a room that no one wants, give that room to me." That's the kind of meekness Jesus talks about in the Beatitudes.

If there is a job that no one wants to do, I'll do that job.

If there's a kid that no one wants to eat lunch with, I'll eat with that kid.

An “E” stands for the phrase *evil is overcome by good*. (Romans 12:21) Once when Jesus was rejected by a Samaritan village who didn’t even allow him in the gates, his disciples wanted permission to ask God to fry the people with lightning strikes in revenge. Jesus rebuked his friends and went on to another village. Jesus never let his own

behavior descend to the level of his enemies. No modern person embodied the spirit of Jesus better than Martin Luther King, Jr. who embodied the amazing and lasting strength of meekness. He endured jailing, beatings, threats and abuse but never returned the evil he received. He did exactly what Jesus taught: he overcame evil with good and all Americans have benefitted from this demonstration of the meekness of Jesus.

Another “E” stands for *emotional stability*. Meekness is the strength to be able to control negative emotions and impulses especially anger. An ancient Hebrew proverb says, “Better a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city.” (Proverbs 16:32). It takes no inner strength to lash out, call names and strike back at others. The strength of meekness is in self-control.

A final “K” stands for *keeping God’s dream for your life first*. Meekness is not about self-abuse. It is about knowing that God has a dream for your life and keeping that dream number one. Jesus lived meekly not to show off his strength but because he was always putting God’s dream first—that was his strength. Never let your dreams—or the dreams of the church—be shaped by the hurts you have but always let your dreams be shaped by your hopes. When your hurts, disappointments and failures become more important to you than your hopes, it is all over for you except to order your tombstone.

What does it mean to inherit the earth? Jesus inherited the earth. All the people who opposed him, ridiculed him and executed him are gone. We don’t even know their names. They were the most powerful people in the first century running the greatest empire in Western civilization and it is all forgotten. Yet this meek Galilean Rabbi is known and worshipped all over the world today. There is no country where his followers are not present. Indeed nearly half the world’s population gladly proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord! What an inheritance!

There is an inheritance for us as well. The Bible says in Revelation 21:1 that the day is coming when we will see a “new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...” God’s greatest dream is that you should inherit the new heaven and earth. Meekness means submitting yourself to this great dream and allowing nothing to get in the way. **M-E-E-K: My self is third; Evil overcome by good; Emotional stability; Keeping God’s dream first.** This is a blessed and happy life. Thanks be to God for giving us to learn inner strength from our gentle Lord Jesus!