

**Psalm 1:1-3; Proverbs 8:32-37; Matthew 5:1-12**      **June 6, 2021**  
*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

## **THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT BE WHO YOU ARE**

***Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.***

According to the “On-line Minister Directory,” the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has clergy with the following names: 3 Elders; 1 Deacon; 4 Brothers (one of whom is a woman); 2 Nunns (both deceased, both men); 2 Priests (one of whom is a woman); 2 Abbots (one of whom is a woman); 8 Popes; 1 Evangelist (actually it’s Evangelista). Sadly, the only Saint died in 2006. Interestingly, there were three ministers named Rev. Christ. Unfortunately, all three have died.

You would hope and expect that your ministers would be Christians. And there are actually two Christians in Memphis. And they happen to be married! And their last name ends in “s,” so they really are Christians! But there are also four other Christian ministers in California, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. Rev. Curtis T. Christian, IV serves in Richmond, Kentucky. From 1994 - 2004, Rev. Christian was pastor of the Cape Fear Presbyterian Church in Wilmington. Our seminary careers overlapped and we served together for a few years in New Hope Presbytery in Northeastern North Carolina. I always thought it was interesting to know “Rev. Christian” and wondered if there was any added pressure to live up to his name. But, then, all of us Christians are called to live up to that name or, as the apostle Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians, “I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-3)

In 1948, a priest in the Cypriot Orthodox Church was studying at Boston University. At the age of thirty-seven, against his will, he was elected Bishop of Kition. He returned to Cyprus to take up his office. His name was Michael Mouskos. Appropriately, his given middle name was Christodoulou, which is translated “servant of Christ.” When he became Archbishop in 1950, he took on the clerical name of Makarios and his title was His Beatitude Makarios, III, Archbishop of Nova Justiniana and All Cyprus. He served as Archbishop from 1950-1977 and also as the first president of Cyprus from 1960-977. Archbishop Beatitude Makarios — talk about a name to live up to and to live into!

“Makarios” is the Greek word for “blessed” — as in “Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . Blessed are those who mourn . . . Blessed are the meek” and so on. Some Bible translations use the word “Happy” instead, which is an appropriate translation, as long as we don’t think Jesus is talking about some kind of superficial happiness that comes and goes depending on the circumstances of life.

I just finished reading the brand-new authorized biography of Eugene Peterson, author of the popular version of the Bible called *The Message*. Here is a brief section about his work on the Beatitudes: “He finished the Beatitudes, and the editor loved what he read. . . There was only one problem. Rather than using *blessed*, Eugene inserted *lucky* — not a bad translation of the Greek word *makarios*, whose meaning carries ‘fortunate’ as well as ‘blessed.’ Eugene kept thinking about folks at Christ Our King: ‘Pastor Pete [which is what church members called him], I got a clean cancer report, I feel so lucky.’ Or the elated dad: ‘I got really lucky. I landed the job.’ *Lucky* was their word to describe abundant, unearned goodness, grace. So *lucky* it was.

“‘You can’t use *lucky*,’ the editor explained. ‘There’s a whole world of Texans out there who think *lucky* is the code name for Lucifer. And a whole other group who think *lucky* is an evil word denying God’s providence. We’d lose a chunk of our audience.’ Eugene picked up the phone. ‘Rick [who was Peterson’s agent, whose last name, providentially, is Christian!], they’re taking away my *lucky*. You got to get it back in there.’ Ultimately, Eugene surrendered, though he smuggled *lucky* in a few places elsewhere. Eventually he got his way with his volume of poetry based on the Beatitudes: *Holy Luck*.”<sup>1</sup>

Blessed, Happy, Lucky . . . however you read the Beatitudes, they are the beginning of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, which has been called Jesus’ “inaugural address.” During the months of June and July, I am going to preach from the Beatitudes. In many a presidential inaugural address, the newly sworn-in president lays out a vision for the nation and may provide some details about how to achieve that vision. Beginning his Sermon on the Mount with the Beatitudes, Jesus tells us who God is and what God is like and calls us to be who we are — “blessed” — as citizens of God’s kingdom here on earth. The rest of the Sermon on the Mount provides details about how to live up to, live into, and live out our name “Christian.”

When Jackson came to be in our family in July 1990, my mom sent us a card. On the outside it said, “Congratulations on your new names . . .” When we opened the card, we saw the words “Mom & Dad!” That’s who we were. That was the new reality of our lives. And ever since that day in July 1990, we have tried to live up to, live into, and live out our new names.

The same can be said of our lives as believers. As we heard in last week’s sermon, “See what love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” (1 John 3:1) Children of God, heirs with Christ, led by the Spirit. We are blessed by God and we bear the name “Christian.” In the book of Acts we are told that “it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called ‘Christians.’” (Acts 11:26) Some sources say “Christian” was first used in a derogatory way — sort of like, “Who do they think they are? Little Christs?” But the source also points out, “The believers’ lifestyle was so clear and unmistakable that this name was assigned to them. Because they put into practice what they had learned from Jesus, they completely achieved the mission that was given to them (and to us): to represent Christ and make Him known.”<sup>2</sup>

That’s a good description of the purpose of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount as a whole. If the Beatitudes describe the Christian lifestyle, and the Christian

lifestyle is meant to represent Christ and make him known, then the blessings of the Beatitudes aren't just for our personal benefit. Ten years ago, the Presbyterian Women study book was called *Confessing the Beatitudes*. In one of the planning resources, Beth Herrinton-Hodge wrote, "The Beatitudes . . . are words of promise, words of hope, words of transformation for those who follow Christ. Jesus pronounces a blessing upon the disciples — the followers of Jesus, the church. The Beatitudes are given as a result of God's divine act of sending Jesus and initiating the coming of the kingdom of God. . . . As one blessed by God, my call and my response are to cling to and bear witness to the will of God for the world . . . God calls us to show the world something different from the chaos and brokenness that surround us. In so doing, there is movement toward the kingdom of God being known on earth . . . The Beatitudes declare the truths of God's blessing. The blessed are moved to act in the world, living and modeling the transforming will of God."<sup>3</sup> Another writer says the same thing, "The Beatitudes are not just blessings but a call to action. The Beatitudes are a call to action for the sake of creating the world God imagines . . . The Beatitudes are a call to action to point out just who Jesus really is. . . . The Jesus who reminds you, at the most inconvenient times and places, what the Kingdom of Heaven is all about."<sup>4</sup>

The other candidate for today's sermon title was "The Be-Attitudes" — as in "Be who you are as children of God, heirs with Christ, led by the Spirit." There are other beatitudes sprinkled throughout the New Testaments. As I read a few of them, listen to how the beatitude/blessing is linked to our identity and our lifestyle as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me." (Matthew 11:6)

Elizabeth's blessing on her cousin Mary, "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (Luke 1:45)

Jesus' response to a woman in the crowd who shouted "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nursed you!" Jesus said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!" (Luke 11:27-28)

After Jesus had washed his disciples' feet and given them an example of loving service: "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." (John 13:17)

Paul quoting Psalm 32 in his letter to the Romans: "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin." (Romans 4:7-8)

And from the letter of James, which is all about showing your faith through your actions: "But those who look into the perfect law, being not hearers who forget but doers who act — they will be blessed in their doing." (James 1:25)

As we hear Jesus' Sermon on the Mount during June and July, remember how the Beatitudes cast the vision of what God's kingdom is like — even here and now — and who we are called to be as people who bear the name "Christian." And, when you think you don't measure up and the Beatitudes can't possibly describe you, remember this beatitude from the most unlikely source, Groucho Marx, who said, "Blessed are the cracked, for they shall let in the light." Which actually is a great teaser for next Sunday's sermon about Jesus saying, "You are the light of the world. . . let your light shine before

others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.”  
(Matthew 5:14, 16)

God bless!

***Let us pray: O God you call us to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called. Show us again how to live as your people, blessed by your Holy Spirit and empowered by Jesus Christ to love with humility, gentleness and patience. Amen.***

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Winn Collier, *A Burning In My Bones: The Authorized Biography of Eugene H. Peterson* (Waterbrook: an imprint of Random House, a division of PenguinRandomHouse, LLC, 2021), pp. 219-220.

<sup>2</sup>Found at “Do You Know Where the Word ‘Christian’ Comes from?” at [www.idisciple.org](http://www.idisciple.org), published by [jesus.net](http://jesus.net).

<sup>3</sup>Beth Herrinton-Hodge, “From Despair to Hope: The Transforming Words of the Beatitudes,” March/April 2020 at [www.presbyterianwomen.org](http://www.presbyterianwomen.org).

<sup>4</sup>Karoline Lewis, “Righteous Living,” January 22, 2017, [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org).