

Arvada
United Methodist Church

January 30, 2011 “**The Subversive Voice**” by Rusty Butler

Scripture: **Matthew 5: 1-12**

How many of you are on Facebook? Some of you are on Facebook. A few of us are friends on Facebook. Everybody has their own idea about it. Some people think it is a colossal waste of time. Other folks have a hard time thinking about what it was like before Facebook came along. In my family, my youngest son, my mom, a couple of nieces, sister in law, brother in law, a couple of aunts are all on Facebook. Lynn, my wife, my oldest son, my brother, my Dad are not on Facebook. Maybe that is the way it is with your family too. Some are plugged in and some are not!

I like it because I can find out a little bit about what is going on in the life of some of my friends and family. I have about 60 clergy friends on Facebook and about the same number of youth from the time when I was a youth director. Sometimes people share the difficulties they are going through and it stops me and brings them to mind and my positive thoughts and prayers go out to them. Sometimes they share the joys they have and it makes me smile, sometimes they share things that are totally irrelevant and it makes me scratch my head. Yesterday, a friend posted a video of the chaos going on in Egypt. I watched it and it made me stop and think about what is happening there and it made me want to learn more.

But Facebook is strange too, Yesterday I got a request from someone I've never heard of, turns out he went to my high school, but I can't remember

Arvada
United Methodist Church

him, I don't think he was in my class, but who knows? And another thing that is strange is that somehow I've ended up with a number of friends I don't even know.

Alyce McKenzie is a professor at Perkins School of Theology, one of the 13 United Methodist Seminaries. She was on Facebook the other day, and she saw a notice that George Strait, the country singer, wanted to be her friend. Now she is from Texas...and everybody in Texas knows George Strait. Anyway, she said her pulse quickened. She isn't necessarily a country music friend, but she thought he is famous and he wants to be my friend! She looked again closer and she saw that George Strait's fan club wanted her to be his fan. A whole different thing!

I wonder if Jesus lived in our time, if he might not get a lot of people requesting to be his friend but when he confirms them, they would never really give him another thought. Of course we know lots of people claim to be his friends and really are barely acquainted with his life story and body of teachings, much less willing to live by them.

Matthew's version of the Beatitudes help us see that Jesus wants not more fans, but friends and disciples. Matthew's gospel emphasizes that to be a follower of Jesus means to live by his teachings. Today we are going to look again at some of those teachings called the Beatitudes.

Would you pray with me?

O God may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts lead us further into the life of faith. Amen.

Arvada
United Methodist Church

The Beatitudes, these pronouncement of blessings, are the beginning of what is called The Sermon On The Mount. It is Matthew's first and longest collection of Jesus' teachings. The picture it paints of Jesus is as the New Moses, Israel's new God-authorized teacher. And the message for the readers and hearers of Matthew is clear following Jesus means living and leaning into his teachings.

For so many of us here, it is hard to understand Jesus as God's son if it means we have to believe that he was born of a Virgin, or that he was able to change the laws of nature, walking on water, changing water into wine, stilling storms, and so we lean on the idea that we are followers of Jesus teachings. And so here are... some of those teachings...

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

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

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

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

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

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

Bless are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.

Arvada
United Methodist Church

The next two have been beatitudes sound like something that might have been added by the church/or the writer of Matthew long after Jesus was crucified to bolster the early church....listen to them again.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 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 know one pastor who when she was younger talked about the Beatitudes turning the world conventional wisdom upside down and she delivered part of her sermon standing on her head. Valerie, did you recover from that?

And they do turn the world on it's head. Listen, "Blessed are those who mourn?...does that sound right? By definition, isn't a person who is mourning unhappy? That subverts what is understood as conventional wisdom. Conventional wisdom says blessed are those who aren't in mourning.

Conventional wisdom says Blessed are those who are rich in spirit...not poor in spirit.

Conventional Wisdom says, Blessed are the ones who are bold and go after what they want...not blessed are the meek.

Arvada
United Methodist Church

Conventional wisdom says blessed are those who are filled with power and the ambition to make things happen not those who hunger and thirst and who are lacking.

Conventional wisdom says the Blessed are those who have a high quality of life, not the persecuted, and those who have a good reputation not those who are reviled and slandered.

But if we are the friends, followers, disciples of Jesus not just the fans of Jesus, we will take time to consider the different way he is calling us to live into the world. That's risky, I know. It subverts the world.

But let's see what happens when we come along side of those who are poor in spirit, if God can't make us contributors to something good on earth.

Let's see what happens when we lament, not just our personal sorrows and grief, but those of all who are subjected to some form of injustice, let's see if we aren't moved to do something about it.

Let's see what happens when we embrace meekness, not as passivity, but as a proactive humility that is a key ingredient of leadership.

Let's see what happens when we "hunger and thirst to see right prevail" and put our actions behind our appetite for justice (5:6).

Let's see what happens when we embrace compassion and forgiveness, recognizing them as actions and not merely as attitudes.

Arvada
United Methodist Church

Let's see what happens when we strive to act in and toward the good.

Let's see what happens when we work for peace in our families, our church,
our community, and people in conflict.

Let's just see what happens.