

November 26, 2017
“Resolutions”
Rev. Santina Poor
Matthew 25: 31-46

Working with Pastor Scott for the past 13 years has taught me a thing or two. His attention to the importance of recognition of liminal spaces in our spiritual lives and practices has made a great impact on me. As Fr. Richard Rohr describes it, liminal space is a sacred space where transformation takes place and God can best get at us. Where “we have to allow ourselves to be drawn out of “business as usual” and remain patiently on the “threshold” where we are betwixt and between the familiar and the completely unknown.”¹ Full confession: lately, my experience with liminal space feels less sacred and more the way an anthropologist describes it: ambiguous and disorienting and I think a little chaotic. As I sit among the packing boxes in our home – full, half full, and waiting to be packed – I am trying really hard to channel my sensei – Pastor Scott – to keep considering and recognizing the sacredness of this time in my and my family’s life. The last few months at MHUCC have really been a liminal space for me. Preparing for my move and my transition from Minister of Faith Formation to the pastor of Hope UCC has been a time of grace, wonder, and transformation for me. I am thankful for the opportunity to offer the sermon today and to express my deep gratitude to you for providing the faith-filled place that prepared me to enter this liminal space leading me into a new challenge – a new existence as pastor of a congregation.

Our text from Matthew is the culmination of Jesus’s teaching in this gospel that began with the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 5. As Jesus prepares his disciples for their lives without his physical presence among them, the disciples inhabit this liminal space but do not fully recognize it as such. The gospel’s author, likewise, is speaking to a community who is waiting for Christ’s return, who are beginning to understand they will be in this ‘in between’ space of Christ’s resurrection and his return a little longer than they thought. But for all listeners, ourselves included, the text offers a final challenge that began with the beatitudes. In the beatitudes, Jesus taught who was blessed in God’s kingdom, warned of hypocrisy and coming conflicts, and shared parables to help us understand how to prepare for the arrival of a king. The challenge Jesus offers in this text is this: did we see the king when he was standing right in front of us?

The answer isn’t as easy as we’d expect as the responses of his listeners demonstrate. The surprise both groups of people experience is relatable. When did we help you? When did we *not* help you? The “righteous” are surprised that their actions – their development of relationship with the marginalized – was kingdom building. Those that are sent away are surprised that what they’ve done does not equate to the way of being that Jesus calls us into. As followers of Christ, it is not just about helping others, it is about seeing all others as members of the kingdom of God – this is what living our faith means. It is not about giving someone simply what they need – it is not simple charity. Jesus call us to boldly, quietly, authentically see the face of God in others. Out of the love with which we are created by God, we are brought into the promise of life with God. That promise, the covenant that Jesus shares with us, compels us to see others as God sees us.

Many of you know that one of my favorite holiday traditions is making New Year’s Resolutions for my husband Bob and our 3 sons, Lewis, Charlie, and MJ. Since I won’t be here after today, I thought I would make a few resolutions for MHUCC to undertake in my absence. Just so you know, I am going to try to keep these resolutions too and I’ll also make them for my new congregation in Moline too!

¹ Richard Rohr: <https://cac.org/liminal-space-2016-07-07/>

Resolution 1: Continue to let God's light shine through you. Find new and challenging ways to do this and people to do them with that surprise you with the revelation of God's presence in all of it.

Resolution 2: I thank Lisa from our Tuesday lectionary group for this one – Stay in close proximity to our brothers, sisters, and siblings on the margins. See them, accompany them, and listen to them in order to begin to fully know them.

Resolution 3 is a little long, but an important thought to end this sermon. Last year I had the opportunity to hear Rev. Nadia Bolz Weber speak at the Festival of Homiletics. She offered an updated version of the Beatitudes that she called Beatitudes 2.0. Since our text today concludes the long narrative that began with Jesus breaking open the Law with teaching the Beatitudes, we'll end with her updated version.

So, Resolution 3: Hold onto these blessings and share God's love with all:

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

Blessed are the agnostics. Blessed are they who doubt. Those who aren't sure, who can still be surprised.

Blessed are they who are spiritually impoverished and therefore not so certain about everything that they no longer take in new information.

Blessed are those who have nothing to offer.

Blessed are they for whom nothing seems to be working.

Blessed are the pre-schoolers who cut in line at communion.

Blessed are the poor in spirit. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you

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

Blessed are they for whom death is not an abstraction.

Blessed are they who have buried their loved ones, for whom tears are as real as an ocean.

Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like.

Blessed are the mothers of the miscarried.

Blessed are they who don't have the luxury of taking things for granted any more.

Blessed are they who can't fall apart because they have to keep it together for everyone else.

Blessed are the motherless, the alone, the ones from whom so much has been taken.

Blessed are those who "still aren't over it yet."

Blessed are they who laughed again when for so long they thought they never would.

Blessed are those who mourn. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you

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

Blessed are those who no one else notices. The kids who sit alone at middle-school lunch tables. The laundry guys at the hospital. The sex-workers and the night shift street sweepers.

Blessed are the losers and the babies and the parts of ourselves that are so small. The parts of ourselves that don't want to make eye contact with a world that only loves the winners.

Blessed are the forgotten.

Blessed are the closeted.

Blessed are the unemployed, the unimpressive, the underrepresented.

Blessed are the teens who have to figure out ways to hide the new cuts on their arms.

Blessed are the meek. You are of heaven and Jesus blesses you.

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

Blessed are the wrongly accused, the ones who never catch a break, the ones for whom life is hard – for they are those with whom Jesus chose to surround himself.

Blessed are those without documentation.

Blessed are the ones without lobbyists.

Blessed are foster kids and trophy kids and special ed kids and every other kid who just wants to feel safe and loved and never does.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Blessed are they who know there has to be more than this. Because they are right.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are those who make terrible business decisions for the sake of people.

Blessed are the burnt-out social workers and the over worked teachers and the pro-bono case takers.

Blessed are the kids who step between the bullies and the weak.

Blessed are they who delete hateful, homophobic comments off their friend's Facebook page.

Blessed are the ones who have received such real grace that they are no longer in the position of ever deciding who the "deserving poor"^{2]} are.

Blessed is everyone who has ever forgiven me when I didn't deserve it.

Blessed are the merciful for they totally get it.²

² <http://www.nadiabolzweber.com/uncategorized/some-modern-beatitudes-a-sermon-for-all-saints-sunday.htm>

Whether we use the traditional language of kingdom of God or the kindom of God, this text asks us to consider how we live out our faith and how do we respond to the news that we are part of God's beloved creation – along with so many others that do not look, act, pray, believe, live, or think like us. To see the face of God in others, where you least expect to meet God, is our challenge going forward. What a blessing for me to know you all and learn from you all about the many beautiful faces of God. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your love and blessings. I will hold you in my heart forever.

Amen