

Neighborhood Communion Group
Discussion Questions
The Beatitudes, part 2

Background (Virtual Edition)

The idea behind neighborhood communion groups arose from the earliest Christian communities that gathered regularly in homes for a time of eating and talking, something often missing in our busy lives. At a time when people are social distancing, we crave being together more than ever, even virtually. Think of it as an electronic version of early church gatherings. Below, you'll find a Scripture passage, along with some suggested questions. As always, a neighborhood Communion group is a chance to enjoy food and food for thought.

Scripture Passage

Matthew 5:1-2, 6-8

"When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying...

'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....

Discussion

Matthew's Gospel records nine beatitudes spoken by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, the ones cited above being the middle three. Beatitudes are marked by the first word in each, translated "blessed" here, although maybe better rendered as "honored." In each case, God appears to bestow honor on people society would not expect. With this in mind, think about the following questions:

- 1) God bestows honor upon those who long for righteousness, or a more accurate translation, justice. In Luke's version the honor is upon those who are hungry, period. Do you see these as related or totally different categories? How does the pandemic affect your views on those who are food insecure? What would justice look like in our world at a time like this? What do you make of the reward being in the future?
- 2) Honor is next bestowed upon the merciful, a term that is used to describe God more so than humans throughout the Old Testament. In other words, acting with mercy is to act as God does toward us. In your view, what aspects of our current situation call for mercy toward others? The promise of a future mercy toward us seems dependent upon the mercy we have shown. How does that strike you?

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- 3) Pure in heart seems to demand perfection on the part of Jesus' followers. Later in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus will even call us to be "perfect" as God is perfect (Matt 5:48). But the meaning there is "wholeness" and pure in heart here implies integrity before God. In other words, while the Beatitudes bestow honor and blessing, they also challenge our behavior. The reward is seeing God at some point. What do you make of this particular beatitude? How do you think of integrity before God? What does seeing God bring to mind?