

Neighborhood Communion Group
Discussion Questions
The Beatitudes, part 3

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, 9-12

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

'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.

Discussion

Matthew's Gospel records nine beatitudes spoken by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, the ones cited above being the final 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's honor is bestowed not upon those who merely love peace, but those who actively pursue and make peace. At a time when Rome was occupying the Holy Land, this would have been quite the challenge. How do you see being a peacemaker as relevant at this time? The reward is being called "children of God." What difference does it make that this is given in the plural (children), not singular (child)?
- 2) Being persecuted hardly seems honorable, but bearing up under Roman occupation called for a measure of grit in Jesus' followers. Unlike persecution, however, which features human agency, the current pandemic is a natural occurrence, not caused by humans or God. How might God's promised honor apply in our situation when it feels like persecution? The promised reward of the "kingdom of heaven" is not about the afterlife above but the movement of God among us now. What do you make of that promise?

- 3) The final beatitude seems to echo the previous one, albeit addressed in second person plural rather than third person. In other words, it is more personal but still corporate. What difference does this make in how you read the words? This final beatitude is expanded upon in terms of consequence, even prompting rejoicing because of two things: future reward and lives compared to how prophets were treated. Which of these seems more meaningful to you?
- 4) What is your final takeaway from reading the Beatitudes in a time of pandemic? Is there one Beatitude in particular you feel drawn to at this time?