

A sermon from January 29, 2017

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Pastor Julie's sermon on Matthew 5:1-12, the Beatitudes, from January 29, 2017

Those of you on social media, like Facebook or Twitter, probably know of the trend of tagging posts or photos #blessed. For those of you who don't know, let me explain.

On social media sites you can "label" your photos or words using a hashtag. That way folks searching for posts in that topic can find it. It has become a trend that many people use the hashtag "blessed" when they post about something good happening to them. Good as in: good health, abundance in any form, good weather, good grades, good food (always with a photo,) a promotion at work, a team winning a sporting event, babies or children sleeping not to mention anything having to do with coffee or wine.

Other "#blessed" posts I've noticed include date night, gym time, nap time, quiet time, fishin' time, narrowly averted disaster and better yet, other people's disaster – which reminds us our lives aren't nearly as bad as that poor fella over there. It has become a way, really, to "humble brag." Have you heard that term before? It means to boast about your accomplishments or all that you have, while pretending to be humble. It's a way to fish for a compliment, acknowledge a success or purposely elicit envy.

We've created a culture in which we measure God's "blessings" in terms of dollars and cents, comfort and pleasure, wealth and well-being. This is the "Prosperity gospel" which says that you MUST be blessed by God if you are wealthy, happy, powerful or a winner.

So, if we're happy and healthy and have everything we need, then we're blessed, and we should thank God on social media.

In other words, the further you get away from the margins, from suffering, the more blessed you are.

This is what the world says.

But Jesus says, "Actually, it's the other way around." Jesus is reaching out to the margins. Jesus says,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account."

In other words, if you are on the margins in anyway, God is especially with you and especially on your side. Contrary to popular belief, the Blessing of God is not what God gives us, the Blessing of God is that God is with us. "Blessed" doesn't mean, "burden-free," or "happy." Blessed means beloved by God.

Judging by posts on social media, our culture says:

Blessed are those:

- with a gorgeous spouse.
 - with a child who is an honor student.
 - with a new, expensive car.
 - with a positive "can do" attitude.
- Blessed are those:
- who can afford a vacation to a beautiful resort.
 - who work out at a pricey gym.
 - who can go fishing on the weekends.
 - who have an IRA and Savings account.
 - who have a housekeeper.

- who can eat high protein, low carbs.
- who can go out to cocktails with a group of their girlfriends.
- who can afford a weekly mani and pedi.
Blessed are they:
 - Who have a new handbag.
- whose team wins the game.
- who take a great selfie.
- who have the newest iphone.
- who receive a college scholarship
- who receive an unexpected raise.

In other words, you will never come across a status update that says,

"Feeling lost and alone. I wonder if God is even listening. #PoorInSpirit #Blessed."

Or like, "Terrible accident killed half my family. Funeral is Monday. #mourning #SoBlessed"

Today Jesus might include other folks in the Beatitudes:

Blessed are the refugees:

Those who are victims of war and poverty

Those who have been evicted

Those who cannot return home

Those who seek a safe place for their children

Those who are feared and despised

Those for whom nobody seems to care
Blessed are the LGBTQ Community

Blessed are the tribes, trying to protect water

Blessed are the scientist, trying to speak truth.

Blessed are women

Blessed are Muslims

Blessed are Mexicans

Blessed are those with no health insurance

Blessed are those cities that lose federal funding for being a sanctuary city.

Blessed are those who are imprisoned, tortured and receive gag orders.

Blessed are you who are marginalized or oppressed in any way.

Blessed are you who are the last, the lost and the least.

God is especially with you. God is on your side. The world may not think so. But God is with you. God is always moving toward you. When you are on the margins: depressed, mourning, ill, left-behind = God is especially with you. God is especially reaching out to you. God is with the suffering in a special way. God showed this most clearly in the person of Jesus Christ, suffering and dying on the cross. Hashtag Blessed.

This doesn't mean that God doesn't love EVERYONE, but God has promised to be especially with the last, lost and the least. They are blessed.

Because blessed does not mean pleased. Blessed does not mean happy. Blessed does not mean fulfilled. It doesn't even mean fed or clothed or housed or healthy...

What it really means is that you are not alone, for God is with you. God's blessing is God's presence. Nothing more. Nothing less. ...Just the Creator of the Universe, the artist and architect of Heaven and Earth, the Bringer of Light, the Weaver of Life, the One who knows you and loves you best of all, finding you in life's most broken places and breathing into your weary soul, "I am that I am, and I am with you."
May you be blessed. Amen.