

Beatitudes and Resolutions
Matthew 5:1-12
Colebrook Congregational Church
January 29, 2017 / Fourth Sunday After Epiphany

Today's selection is the beginning of Jesus' First Discourse, His greatest, and better known as the Sermon on the Mount. This Sermon includes very familiar verses including the lessons about the Salt of the Earth, the Light of the World, not keeping a light hidden under a bushel, turning the other cheek, loving one's enemies, the Lord's Prayer, and Judging not, lest ye be judged.

But it all begins with the Beatitudes. These found in Matthew's Gospel are nine promises about the Kingdom of God. When we last covered the Beatitudes, it was those presented in Luke's Gospel, and there are differences, mostly that Luke has four blessings and four woes.

When we look at just Matthew's version, scholars discovered that in the original Aramaic, the Beatitudes have rhyme and rhythm, there is artistic repetition in phrase, and the longer final line conforms to the conventions of Jewish poetry.

The Beatitudes tell us who are “blessed,” and the word translated as “blessed,” is describing that state of happiness that you have when you know that God sees you. Jesus uses themes that are very similar to those found in the Old Testament, but He gives them a new meaning. They become a new set of ideals that focus on love and humility, presenting the highest ideals of His teachings on spirituality and compassion.

For me, the Beatitudes, and the whole Sermon on the Mount, is something that is supposed to confront us and make us examine what we do in our lives. From the descriptions, it is clear that Jesus is expecting His teachings to be put into practice. It is not a general ethic that He is presenting here, but a very specific one, and it should make all of us think about ourselves and how we live our lives.

It's for this reason, I made a photogram of the whole Sermon and I have hung it near the door wherever I have lived for the last 20 years. The last thing I see before I leave my home is these words of Jesus that challenge and demand a certain type of behavior and attitude and even a worldview.

The Beatitudes show that for Jesus, being righteous is more than the sum of the His Commandments. Being righteous, is a total attitude of mind and one's innate character. The people praised and raised up in the Gospels by Jesus are people of humility, love, trust, fidelity, and courage...and yet, are not perfect, but are on the Path of righteousness, directed towards God.

This is the time of year, more so than other times, where we acknowledge our own lack of perfection, examine our lives, and come up with New Year's Resolutions that we would strive toward in the coming year.

In that same spirit, Jonathan Edwards came up with 70 Resolutions that he would read through weekly. This was not something that he published or put out there for the world to see; it was extracted from his personal papers and notes to himself, giving us great insight into his character and worldview and thoughts. Like the Beatitudes, these Resolutions challenges us and are designed to help orient us towards God, and acknowledge our own imperfections and shortcomings.

I have chosen a handful from the list that uses modernized language for us to consider and meditate upon for the coming year.

The First Resolution is like an overview, presenting Edwards' overall mindset.

Resolved: I will DO whatever I think will be most to God's glory; and my own good, profit and pleasure, for as long as I live. I will do all these things without any consideration of the time they take. Resolved: to do whatever I understand to be my duty and will provide the most good and benefit to humankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I encounter, and no matter how many I experience or how severe they may be.

The Third Resolution is a recognition of the reality of one's own frailty and imperfection.

Resolved: If ever – really, whenever – I fail & fall and/or grow weary & dull; whenever I begin to neglect the keeping of any part of these Resolutions; I will repent of everything I can remember that I have violated or neglected, ... as soon as I come to my senses again.

The Fifth Resolution reminds me of the Puritan saying about how, “Idle hands are the Devil's Workshop,” a saying that has encouraged me to keep active as much as I can.

Resolved: Never lose one moment of time; but seize the time to use it in the most profitable way I possibly can.

The Seventh Resolution seems to recall Jesus' teaching about how we do not know the day or hour before it is too late.

Resolved: Never to do anything which I would be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life.

The Thirteenth Resolution encourages us to be aware of what is going on around us, to be ready to help those in need.

Resolved: To be endeavoring to discover worthy objects of charity and liberality.

The Fourteenth Resolution recalls how the Bible repeatedly tells us that vengeance is God's to repay. We give that up to God, relieving ourselves of that burden.

Resolved: Never to do anything out of revenge.

The Fifteenth Resolution is just good stress management!

Resolved: Never to suffer the least emotions of anger about irrational beings.

The Twenty-fourth Resolution is more a recognition of the reality of life, that we will stumble and make mistakes, and seek reconciliation.

Resolved: Whenever I do any conspicuously evil action, I will trace it back till I come to the original cause; and then I will carefully endeavor BOTH 1) to do so no more AND 2) to fight and pray with all my might against the source of the original impulse.

The Fifty-Sixth Resolution to me seems is meant to be inspirational, but ends with the realistic acknowledgment that we may fail in our efforts.

Resolved: Never to give up, nor even slacken up, in my fight with my own corruptions, no matter how successful or unsuccessful I may be.

And lastly, the Fifty-Eighth Resolution, which is just good advice.

Resolved: Not only to refrain from an air of dislike, fretfulness, and anger in conversations, but also to exhibit an air of love, cheerfulness and graciousness.

Now, many of these Resolutions should be recognizable to us as being very similar to the teachings that we find in the Bible, as well as having a sense of the realistic. Edwards knew that he was not going to be able to do all these, he knew that he was going to falter. He accepted this realization, but with the understanding that once his missteps were recognized, he would make amends however he could, then keep trying to keep to the Resolutions. His weekly review of the Resolutions probably helped him a lot with this. One of my resolutions this year is to try to do the same with his list.

And now, as we go into the New Year, I hope that you have worthwhile self-examinations and then set for yourselves practical, yet challenging resolutions.

Please join me in the spirit of prayer:

O God, our Deliverer, You walk with the meek and the poor, the compassionate and those who mourn, and You call us to walk humbly with You. When we are foolish, be our wisdom; when we are weak, be our strength; and as we learn to do justice and to love mercy, Your Kingdom comes, blessing us all, Amen.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER

[PAUSE]

O God who welcomes all in love, to You we pray for the good of Your church, our community, and the concerns of those in need. We lift up our hearts in faith to You, the one who hears all prayers and holds close all of Creation.

We thank You for the opportunities You give us to act and serve in Your name, for the blessings of our lives, and for those You have sent to aid us in our times of need.

God of Hope, hear us as we confess that which weighs us down, that has caused our missteps, when we fall short of what You have Called us to be. Save us from all foolishness and guide us to Your wisdom.

We offer our prayers for our family and loved ones, for neighbors and strangers. Grant them health & wellness of mind, body, and spirit; peace and safety from all harm and conflicts worldwide; and for comfort for those who find themselves grieving; or in uncertain situations. We pray for unity for those who are being kept apart. We pray for the caregivers and our protectors, guide them and keep them safe.

We pray for Your guidance in all that we do, and for Your strength of spirit to do what is right, and to act generously towards all, full of Christ's Love. May we also remember to be tolerant of those whose opinions are different from our own, seeking harmony in all our relationships. Inspire us to follow Christ's Way, making us instruments of Your Love in our community.

We especially pray for:

Loving God, open our ears to hear your word and draw us closer to You, that we all may be one with You, as You are one with us in Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.

Psalm 15

O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill? Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors; in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the LORD; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent. Those who do these things shall never be moved.

Micah 6:1-8

Hear what the LORD says: Rise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear your voice. Hear, you mountains, the controversy of the LORD, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for the LORD has a controversy with his people, and he will contend with Israel. "O my people, what have I done to you? In what have I wearied you? Answer me! For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what King Balak of Moab devised, what Balaam son of Beor answered him, and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the saving acts of the LORD." "With what shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Matthew 5:1-12

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 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. "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.