

First Presbyterian Church of Birmingham  
Wonderful News: Blessed are the Meek  
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Numbers 12:1-9; Matthew 5:5

It was about as cliché a Junior High school moment as one could imagine. It occurred sometime during the first week of school when I was walking down a hallway with a couple of my friends. Some older students were walking quickly past us when one of them clapped one of my friends on the back and said, “Welcome to Fondren.” The upperclassmen and his friends then continued their way laughing hysterically. It was at that moment that I noticed the piece of paper taped to my friend’s back. It read, “Please Kick me.” That incident always comes to my mind when I read this beatitude, blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. It does so because my image of “the meek” has always been those who walk around with a sign on their back reading, “kick me.” The meek are those who let people walk all over them. The meek are those who cower in the corner. All of which has begged the question for me, how can the meek inherit the earth when we know that it is the powerful who rule the earth; the powerful who control the earth; and the powerful who oppress the meek? That being the case, what then are we to do with this beatitude? The answer is that we are to see it through the eyes of a first century Galilean Jew...then we will not only understand it, but we will find the wonderful news in this beatitude.

To discover the full meaning and the wonderful news of this beatitude I don’t want us to begin with the meek, but with “inherit the earth.” I would guess that for most of us this would be a strange concept. After all, how can someone inherit the earth? For a first century Galilean Jew however, inheriting the earth would be one of the great themes of their faith. So, let’s unpack it. First the earth is God’s, or as the Psalmist writes, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fulness thereof...” meaning creation belongs to God and God can do with the earth as God desires. Second, God has children, meaning the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which would include those Galilean Jews in Jesus’ audience. Third, just as an earthly parent can give an inheritance to his or her children God can do the same. God can therefore give the earth as an inheritance to God’s children so that those children can rule and reign over it in order that the creation become a place of blessing for all nations; a place of peace, justice and love. There is one catch, however. And this has to do with the children. You see, first century Galilean Jews would not believe that all Jews would inherit. Those listening to Jesus would believe that only the righteous, meaning those who loved God and neighbor, showed kindness and did justice would inherit. It is with that in mind then that we return to the “meek.”

The Greek word we translate as “meek” never meant anything resembling the concept of walking around with a “kick me” sign on the back. The meaning of meek consisted of two integrated concepts. The first concept is humility. To be meek meant to be humble in the sense

that a person acknowledges that they are not capable of knowing how to be righteous, of knowing how to love God and neighbor. Thus, a meek person is one who knows their limitations. The second concept is a word picture. It is the picture of a horse who has been trained to follow the lead of the rider; of a horse who goes exactly where the rider takes it. To be meek then, in Jewish circles meant to be someone who is humble enough that they know they cannot become righteous on their own, and so allows God to guide them. What the beatitude actually says then is, those who are willing to be humble enough to allow God to guide them into the way of loving God and neighbor will inherit this creation for the purpose of ruling and reigning over it, so that it can become a place of peace, justice and love. This my friends is wonderful news.

One of the great gifts we are given this morning is that we have an opportunity to see exactly what being meek looks like. We see it as this table (the communion table). We see it here because this is the culmination of Jesus living the meek life. In other words, Jesus was humble enough to allow God to guide him throughout his life. Jesus was humble enough to allow God to guide him to eat with sinners and tax collectors; to heal Jews and Gentiles; to welcome strangers; to forgive sinners; to feed the hungry and ultimately to go to the cross; to give up his life as the act of ultimate love in order that others might find the strength to become meek as well. What Jesus' death on the cross did was to allow the life giving, sin forgiving power of God's infinite love to be poured out on all creation so that people of all nations, languages, skin colors, sexual orientations and abilities might become children of God who inherit the task of recreating the creation we inherit. This is wonderful news for us and for the world.

My challenge to you on this day is this, that as you take the bread and cup, ask yourselves, "How am I being meek?" How am I being humble enough to allow God to guide and direct what I think, say and do? How am I allowing God to guide me into righteousness?"