

Questions of Faith
How Will the Meek Inherit The Earth?
Matthew 5:1-12
January 17, 2010

“Questions of Faith”, that is the title of my current sermon series. I asked you what puzzled you about your faith. I took those questions and am now trying to answer them.

Last Sunday the question was about a specific story Jesus tells. At first glance it appears Jesus is encouraging us be dishonest. As we discovered, the story was really about how we manage our talents and our treasures.

This morning’s question also comes from the bible. Rather than a story, the person who posed the question has a problem with a specific teaching. There within what we refer to as the Beatitudes is the statement “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth”.

How can the meek inherit the earth? That was the question! Given the advantage those with power and might have, how can Jesus say the meek are the ones that will ultimately succeed?

Before we address the question it might be helpful to spend a few moments looking at the Beatitudes.

Chapter 5 begins with the Sermon on the Mount. We call it that because in the first verse it says “Jesus went up a mountainside with his disciples and sat down to teach them”.

The Sermon on the Mount goes on for 3 Chapters in Matthews’s Gospel. Though much of the teachings deal with specific issues, Jesus begins with nine (9) statements that touch on moral and character issues.

“Blessed are” if you look in your pew bible, you will notice the word “blessed” is missing. Instead of the word blessed, the Good News Version uses the word happy. I admit it seems strange seeing that word. If you look at the original Greek word however, you will find the word representing happiness.

Since we associate happiness with feelings of joy and satisfaction, it seems strange to think that those who are mourning or those who are being persecuted would feel happy. In this case happy is not a feeling; instead it is a congratulatory salutation. The Beatitudes state those who are happy in God's sight.

Another thing that's important to understand about the Beatitudes is that they are all promises of the Kingdom of God. Since they are happy in God's sight, they will receive these promises in God's Kingdom. That kingdom is now in heaven but one day it will fully be on earth.

That point comes into play when we think of the earth that the meek will inherit. Jesus is not talking about a political takeover by the meek of the world, instead he is referring to a time when the earth as we know it will be transformed.

Though this Beatitude has eternal aspirations it does have current applications. Let's look then at the three (3) Beatitudes. The traditional reading says the meek will inherit the earth. Our pew bible states: "Happy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised."

When we hear the word meek, another word often comes to mind. That word of course is weak! When you research the word meek you realize that is a poor association. Meekness has nothing to do with weakness. Often it takes the strongest to be meek.

There is a saying that I have sometimes put on the outside church sign. That saying goes: "If You Think Meek Is Weak, Try Being Meek For A Week". Meekness is being able to be humble. Another word translated for meekness is gentleness. In Greek, meekness can be defined as strength under control.

The whole point of meekness is not that you are unable to exert force, you just choose not to.

An example I came across is that of a wild stallion. That horse, can be taught to be ridden. Just because it has allowed itself to be tamed, doesn't mean the power and the will is no longer there.

Those that decide to be meek realize there is more satisfaction with Christ than anything one can get from this world. Power and force may bring a temporary high, but that cannot be sustained.

History is filled with individuals as well as nations that were once all-powerful. Over a period of time these persons or countries eventually lost their might.

In the ancient world you think of mighty Rome. The power and control of Rome was far reaching. Along comes a simple prophet from Galilee that was crucified on a cross. As Dr. Martin Luther King once wrote, "Caesar will occupy a palace and Christ a cross, but one day that same Christ will rise up and split history into B.C. and A.D., so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by his name".

Speaking of Dr. King, tomorrow we will remember his legacy. He and others in the civil rights movement dared to challenge the evils of racism. Many powerful men preferred the status quo. They did not want to share equally with persons of color. They used force to try to put a stop to the movement.

But still Dr. King and others kept at it, not in an aggressive way, but in a form of nonviolence resistance. In the end laws were changed, buses, schools and lunch counters were integrated.

Nonviolent resistance is an example of meekness played out. Those that are resisting are not helpless or weak. Dr. King said: "first, this is not a method for cowards; it does resist. The nonviolent resister is just as strongly opposed to the evil against which he protests, as is the person who uses violence. His method is passive or nonaggressive in the sense that he is not physically aggressive toward his opponent. But his mind and emotions are always active, constantly seeking to persuade the opponent that he is mistaken."

Dr. King was a humble, gentle, meek man. His philosophy about confronting evil comes right from Jesus. Though others encouraged him to fight force with force, he kept true with his nonviolent strategy.

I am a big fan of Dr. King. Once when I was in Atlanta for a conference I went to the MLK Center. There are many artifacts from Dr. King's life on display. The one thing that really struck me was his suit.

I always pictured Dr. King to be a large man. Since his work was so great, I just assumed he was a fair sized individual. Come to find out he was not tall at all! Dr. King was less than six feet tall.

There was another leader that was short in stature but long on legacy. That leader was Mohandas Gandhi. It was Gandhi's use of nonviolent resistance against the British Empire that inspired Martin Luther King Jr. to use it in his work towards civil rights.

Though the phrase "the meek shall inherit the earth" is primarily about the future in God's Kingdom, Gandhi and Dr. King have proved to us meekness can advance justice today.

Now that we better understand the concept of meekness, the question becomes what can we take from this Beatitude this morning? One thing we can do is make a commitment to keep our strength under control. Though we may get so angry, so frustrated that we feel like lashing out, we need to maintain control. Only by doing so do we lessen evils grip on us and those against us.

Another thing we can do, especially in light of the holiday tomorrow, is pledge ourselves to working against injustice. In small or big ways we can do what we can to stick up for those being oppressed, mistreated or prejudiced against.

If we do that, we are fulfilling another definition of meekness I read. That definition said meekness is taking your power, your influence and using it for someone else rather than yourself.

Isn't that what Jesus did on the cross?