

Kirby Lawrence Hill  
February 2, 2014  
Micah 6:1-8  
Matthew 5:1-12

Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church  
  
  
BEING, DOING

“Have a blessed day,” the cashier in lane number three told me with a smile after scanning my purchases. Quite a number of people say something like that these days when there is a brief encounter of some sort. Perhaps, it goes a bit beyond, “Have a nice day,” as a polite way to say goodbye. Or perhaps, it is a way to make an expression of faith when one’s boss might not want a cashier saying “God bless you,” even to those who didn’t sneeze. Was I more blessed by going through lane three instead of lanes one or two, where the cashiers seemed friendly, but didn’t say a blessed thing?

The section which contains the beatitudes, is the preamble to Jesus’ sermon on the mount. It gets us to thinking about blessings that come from God. What is it to be blessed? There are members of the Broncos and Seahawks teams that might consider themselves to be blessed to have made it to the Super Bowl. By the end of the game tonight, the team who wins might be even more inclined to consider itself blessed than the 31 other NFL teams which came up short of their goal. Those sports fans who can afford \$1300 to \$1800 tickets to the game might consider themselves to be blessed.<sup>1</sup> Companies that can readily pay for the \$4 million 30-second commercials for tonight might think of themselves as being blessed.<sup>2</sup>

Something tells me that Jesus defines a state of blessing differently from some of those folks. None of his nine beatitudes say, “Blessed are the winners,” or “blessed are the rich.” Many in that day and in our own might understand God’s blessing as being evidenced by access to that which is expensive, whereas Jesus emphasizes the expansive nature of God’s blessings that extend even to those who might have been thought of as being cursed.

The blessings reach even those who don’t necessarily do anything to deserve them. Those who are poor in spirit or those who are mourning, Jesus declares are blessed by a God who not only does not leave them destitute, but who offers the full store of heaven’s reign and comfort for their lives. They are touched by God and Jesus wants them to understand themselves as those God wants to embrace. They get blessed for who they are, not what they have done.

But then there are some of the other beatitudes that focus on what people have done. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” Jesus said. And blessed are those who hold onto righteousness even when they are being persecuted. Jesus indicates these people are blessed through what they do. In our passage from Micah, we are told that God requires us to do certain things – do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God. We are called to do what is just and right, and to go beyond that in working on behalf of those who are treated unfairly, seeking change for those who are oppressed or powerless to fend for themselves. As God’s people we are to live out our love for the ways of kindness and faithfulness. In the original Hebrew, the verb does not have to do with the feelings of love, but with the actions of love. And those actions take many forms including generosity, compassion, and helpfulness. God’s people are to also be in a constant state of pilgrimage, humbly doing what we can to discern the direction God is moving while recognizing our reliance upon our ever-present guide.

What is this? God blesses some without it being earned. And yet God requires or calls for certain actions of all people of faith? Is this a contradiction? Are we blessed for being or for doing? If we go back a little further in our passage from Micah, before there is the call to faithful action, we hear

that God had already blessed the people through liberating them from slavery and bringing them into the promised land. When they were called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God, there were always earlier blessings along the way. Whatever we might be called to do in living out our faith, there is always blessings from God preceding that moment. God does not operate a meritocracy, making sure people only get what they earn or deserve. Rather, God is generous with blessings, going far beyond anything we could ever merit.

Some of the blessings are guidance for our actions, including the call to be peacemakers and the challenge to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. It is a blessing that we are called to love God and neighbor - guidance, a commandment which gives meaning to our very lives. It is an additional blessing that God provides us with an empowering Spirit that enables us to act with faithfulness. We aren't told to do something without being given the means. What's more, scripture indicates time and again that God's blessings are given, not just to be soaked up by living sponges, but to be reflected and shared with others. We are blessed, in part in order to be a blessing to others. And getting to reflect God's blessings to others can be an additional blessing to us.

Jesus strongly witnesses that the blessings of God are abundant for those who are enabled to perceive them. Blessed are you and you and you, he said to people who were surprised to hear it. And I don't want to give the impression that these divine blessings are like little wrapped packages that drop out of heaven. In fact, the greatest blessing is that we have a God who wants to be in a deep, abiding, loving relationship with you and me. We see that most clearly in the person who was blessing so many people from the mountain that day and from the valley on other days. We have a God who comes to us, whose blessed and blessing presence showers us with love. We have a God who comes to us when we are hurting. We have a God who comes to us when we need direction. We have a God who comes to us to enable us to live faithfully as the people we were created to be.

So the next time I go through checkout lane number three, how do you think I should respond to the clerk who says, "Have a blessed day,"? Perhaps, I could say, "Thanks for helping it be so." But even more than that, I'm thankful for any reminder that we have a Lord who says to us, "Have a blessed day and have a blessing day." We have a Lord who delivers those blessings to us in person so that they can be shared. We have a God whose loving presence is the greatest of blessings we could ever know. So yes, whether you are in a state of being or doing, I hope you recognize that this day and each day is a blessed one.

<sup>1</sup> Stubhub.com

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/super-bowl-ads-2014-what-does-4-million-really-buy-you-1551884>