

OPEN TO THE DIVINE  
[written in oral form]

Matthew 5:1-11  
MT series on Comfort Food

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In case you just tuned in, the ministry team theme is Comfort Food. This passage, the beatitudes, has lots of tasty morsels.

It is like a casserole. There is a bunch of stuff in it, and we like it, but we are not sure why.

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We seek comfort in times of distress, anxiety, fatigue and fear.  
We hope our edible comfort food will soothe and assuage the emotions.  
However, we also yearn for spiritual comfort nourishment.

The beatitudes are a smorgasbord for the hurting, hungry and needy.  
The conditions Jesus identified reveals the needs in the audience...AND they grant insight to the path of healing and wholeness.

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Those present 2,000 years ago represented a large variety of people with various needs and interests.

Verse 1 states "crowds". It is plural. It was an eclectic group.

Some were seekers or the curious.  
Some were skeptics, and many were desperate for help.  
And likely, some were radicals hoping for a militant leader.

According to Matthew 4:24 Jesus' fame was spreading, mostly because Jesus was healing and helping people.

Jesus opens not with platitudes for the elite and powerful.

Jesus goes to the heart of the matter. He calls out to the poor, the meek, the grieving and so on.

This is significant.

In contrast, we humans tend to lift up and admire the strong, the rich and the successful.  
To be sure, we evaluate and measure based on what is measurable. Which are our constructed criteria.

Recognizing success is tricky. We appraise based on conclusions.

Jesus seemed to identify and honour the potential.

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We humans strive for recognition for our achievements.

We like the rewards, and we tend to admire the successful.

Awards and privilege are the perks.

And, I fear that we tend to judge and respect others based on our perception of their power and status.

?Do we dismiss the weak and the apparent failures in society.

Yet, truth be told, awards and status are ineffective comfort foods.  
Such honours have more in common to a drug that satisfies an addiction. They do little for the pain and emptiness inside.

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I think that is why the Beatitudes are so appealing.  
In this text, Jesus reaches out and touches the soul.

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While living in Louisville attending seminary, my next-door neighbour had one teenage daughter. Her name was Camille.

Camille had Downs Syndrome.

My initial thinking was "how sad" / "how frustrating for all".

My tainted evaluation was based on elitist expectations.

I could see how the Syndrome affected her appearance and intellect, and I thought, "What can she accomplish in life?" "She will always be dependent on others."

I had pity on her.

She was nice and I chatted with her whenever I saw her.

Yet, I did not have a deep respect for her.

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Soon after I became divorced, her compassionate intuition knew something was wrong.

So, she made a point of everyday coming to my house to give me a hug and repeatedly say, "I love you. I love you, Gordon."

That was Powerful food for the soul.

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Almost every year, she calls me on my birthday.

I missed the call a couple of weeks ago, but she left a voice message.

She said, "This is Camille. I love you. Happy Birthday. I love you, my childhood friend."

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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.

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Blessedness is Not an inward awareness or feeling.  
We probably do not feel like we are blessed when we mourn, are hungry or poor in spirit.

Blessedness is in regards to a condition as seen by Jesus.

Jesus was presenting the contrast between outward appearances and inner reality.  
Jesus saw beyond the superficial / beyond our projected standards.

Moreover, Jesus was identifying the state of being / the condition that opens us to divine reception.

When we embrace and acknowledge these conditions of the soul, then we will better understand Jesus.

This is Jesus who grieved for others, who was persecuted, who was a peacemaker, and who keenly knew that he needed God.  
He knew he was poor in spirit. He needed God.  
Being as Jesus opens our soul to God.

The Blessedness is the comfort food we receive when, WHEN capture who we really are, deep down in the soul.

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I think that too often, when we are tormented and weary, we reach for junk food.  
This could be actually food...or commodities ...or accolades and affirmation.... Or comfort from wealth.

Like a drug, such things ease the pain, but are not a cure.

Most of us have a pain aversion. We will maneuver to avoid or quiet the pain.

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Jesus went to the mountain, sat down and presented an invitation to enter the pain in order to discover healing.

We are hurting, hungry, grieving and seeking peace and mercy.  
Likewise, the church is hurting and suffering from this pandemic. Or, more accurately stated, the pandemic has revealed our condition.

The church is shrinking. The church is withdrawing.

The outside world does not regard the church as a place of hope and healing.

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Yes, we long for the time / **our desired comfort food** of singing together, unmasked. We yearn to hug and to share potlucks, and maybe dance in celebration.

Those are all wonderful things, but they are NOT the future hope for the church.

The hope / the salvation for the church is in crying, even weeping.  
This is Not a self-pity cry, but a cry with others and all things for healing, for God.  
Our future is being a community of shared tears.

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The 1993 movie Schindler's List is a powerful and emotionally charged movie. Oskar Schindler was the feature character, played by Liam Neeson.

Schindler was a German industrialist and opportunist. He looked to make a fortune in producing materials for the Nazis. Instead, once inside the system, he saw the Jews being persecuted, abused and murdered. Schindler persuaded the Nazi leaders to let him remove Jews from the death camp to be slave laborers in his factories.

He brought in hundreds and hundreds, men, women and children. In addition, his products were intentionally flawed so as to spoil the war effort.  
He saved hundreds of lives.

At the end of the movie, the war had just ended. All the Jewish slave laborers are free and they gather around Schindler as he is about to leave. The Allies would regard him as a Nazi supporter, so he has to flee.

All the laborers surround Schindler to thank him, yet he breaks down in tears. He looks around, and cries out, "I could have got more people out." He glances to his car and wails, "That car could have saved 10 more people."  
Down on his knees he weeps, and all those saved souls around him reach in and join him weeping in grief and sorrow.. ..and joy.

That is an image for the living church.

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Richard Rohr said:  
"We worship Jesus instead of following him on his same path.  
We made Jesus into a mere religion instead of a journey toward union with God and everything else.  
This shift made us into a religion of belonging and believing instead of a religion of transformation.

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Transformation does not come from being "keepers of the faith"  
It does not happen by knowing the answers or arrogantly trying to rescue people.

Transformation is from God.

So, no matter your religion,.. no matter your station in life, .. no matter your appearance or intellect ....

blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn and the meek.

Blessed are those who hunger for righteousness and are criticized for that pursuit.

Blessed are the merciful, the pure of heart and the peacemakers.

For they are on the path of Christ.

They are open to God's touch of healing and transformation.

**That is the soul comfort food our soul, all souls are crying for.**