

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday- A 2011  
Matthew 5  
Deacon Pat Hall

Folks, this is as good as it gets.

This is quintessential Jesus.

What you heard in today's Gospel are the Beatitudes, the blessings that introduce Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount.

If we get this, we get Jesus.

By "getting it", I'm not necessarily talking about understanding.

Our most inspiring teachings are mystical, beyond our understanding, but not beyond our embracing.

These are the words upon which everything else Jesus says are measured.

These are the words that are rooted in the Jewish faith as we heard from Zephaniah today about a lowly, truthful people seeking justice and humility.

These are the words that inspired the New Testament writers as Paul today spoke of the weak, lowly and despised as being the chosen of God.

If you ever have anybody tell you that Jesus says this or God wants that, if it is not consistent with the Beatitudes, feel free to doubt their authenticity.

Today with the popularity of conspiracy theories, there has been a resurging interest in the Gnostic Gospels.

The popular belief is that these are ancient writings about Jesus that purport some truth that the powerful Church extinguished in protection of its own self-interest.

This was vividly portrayed in a movie a few years ago called the DaVinci Code.

These additional gospels are nothing new to Biblical scholars.

They include books with titles like: *The Gospel of Mary*, *The Gospel of Judas* and *The Gospel of Philip*.

*The Gospel of Thomas* is one such gospel.

I had a prof at Notre Dame who learned the Coptic language just so he could study the original text.

Some scholars think this collection of sayings contains actual Jesus statements not found in our canonical gospels.

But yet, when one reads *The Gospel of Thomas* as a whole, it flunks on the Beatitudes test.

*The Gospel of Thomas* was very tough on women and saw them as a distraction to the divine will.

That's not the Jesus we know and the early Christians could discern from all

of the many writings about Jesus, those which spoke of the Jesus they knew by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

And so, if these Beatitudes are to be what we judge the rest of our Christian faith, shouldn't we embrace them, become familiar with them?  
If I would memorize them, would they be available when I need to discern through Jesus' eyes?

They promise blessedness.  
I have also seen it translated as "happiness".  
They offer a way to live life fully.  
They assure us of God's most intimate presence in our most dire circumstance.  
They promise a future of joy in the Kingdom of Heaven.

And as it is true that the eternal Kingdom of Heaven waits for us after we take our last breath, it is also true that the Kingdom offers heaven in living the here and now.

These words not only offer us the way to be truly human, they also reveal the face of God.  
Imagine a God who mourns and see Jesus weeping at the death of his friend, Lazarus.  
Imagine a God who is meek and see a baby lying in a manger.

I am going to give you a chance to contemplate these Beatitudes.  
I am going to reread just the "Blessed are..." phrases.  
I will allow 20 seconds of silence after each one for you to listen to what God has to say to you.  
When in your past have you mourned or been persecuted?  
Where was God in that?  
How do these words describe the very nature of God?

Get comfortable first in your chairs.  
Take a deep breath and a full exhale.  
Be still and ask God to speak to you.

Now get comfortable  
and breathe.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit.*

20 seconds

*Blessed are they who mourn.*

20 seconds

*Blessed are the meek.*

20 seconds

*Blessed are they who hunger and thirst (for God).*

20 seconds

*Blessed are the merciful.*

20 seconds

*Blessed are the clean of heart.*

20 seconds

*Blessed are the peacemakers*

20 seconds

*Blessed are they who are persecuted.*

20 seconds

Rejoice and be glad. Heaven is your great reward.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Amen