**Beatitudes 2  
Mourning and blessed**

Will Fitzgerald

Kalamazoo Mennonite Fellowship

May 21, 2017

Matthew 5:1-12, Luke 6:20-26

Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. (Luke 6:21)

Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. (Luke 6:25)

**Preface**

To be honest, I felt so hypocritical in the first section of this teaching, that I didn’t talk about the “age of entertainment.” But it did come up from others as we talked after the sermon, so I thought I would send the original. You can make of my hypocrisy what you will.

­——

Someday, historians will look back on our era and give it a name. And I wonder what that name will be. Perhaps they’ll call it the early age of the intelligent machine. Perhaps they’ll call it the early days of the post-biological era. But another possibility will be the Age of Entertainment, with all the ways we can buy or seek pleasure for ourselves: gaming, movies, online porn, Facebook, pop music, delicious food, powerful drugs, delightful clothing. We are rich in options for entertainment and self-pleasure.

Listen to these words of Ecclesiastes:

Sorrow is better than laughter,

for by sadness of face the heart is made glad.

The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning,

but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. (Ecclesiastes 7:3–4)

And Jesus told a parable about someone who, like us, was rich, rich in fine clothing and the ability to eat sumptuous meals every day. But he died and went to a bad place, and the image we’re given is he’s ended up in a place just the opposite of what he had on earth: instead of sumptuous food, he doesn’t even have a drop of water to drink. Instead of fine clothing, he is unprotected from the fiery elements around him.

He remembers a beggar named Lazarus who had died outside his door, and he asks Father Abraham to send Lazarus to give him just a drop of water to ease his thirst and ease the fire.

It’s too late, says Father Abraham. “Remember,” says Abraham to the rich man, “that you received your good things during your lifetime, and likewise Lazarus evil things; that is why he is comforted, while you are in pain.” I imagine that Abraham and Lazarus and the rich man could have been together in the good place, but the choices of the rich man put him on the wrong side of the chasm.

And I wonder: who had finer clothes, the rich man, or us? Who had better access to sumptuous food in abundance, the rich man, or us? Who had better video games, and movies, and social media?

“Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep,” says Jesus.

David Warren, of *The Catholic Thing*, wrote something[[1]](#endnote-1) about the Beatitudes that I really like. When someone gives a speech, they usually acknowledge their audience in some way. You know, such as to say, “Ladies and Gentlemen,” or to describe the group they’re speaking to, such as saying, “It is a great honor to be asked to speak to the members of the Pipe and Retrofitters Union.”

And Jesus is doing the same thing in his opening words of his Sermon on the Mount, acknowledging to whom he was speaking: the poor and the meek and the mourning. In doing so, he honors and acknowledges those to whom he is speaking.

Jesus is speaking to us who mourn.

Some of us are mourning the loss of people we love. This Monday is Memorial Day, and some of us may be bringing to memory our fathers and mothers and friends and family we have lost. Some of our sorrow is fresh, and some of our sorrow is old. For myself, I am remembering and missing my father and mother and grandparents, and Bess’s father and mother.

Some of us are sad because we don’t know the meaning of our lives. What is it all about, anyway? We medicate ourselves with those pleasurable things, but usually find them to be, in Jeremiah’s words, broken and empty cisterns, which do not satisfy our longings. Or we just find ourselves following our duties and responsibilities, without much joy in them.

Some of us mourn because of the losses in our own bodies: we are sick, or weaker than we once were; we’re not as sharp as we used to be. Or perhaps we bear brokenness that has been with us since the beginning. Or we see this happening in people whom we love.

Some of us are sad because we are not the kind of people we want to be. In Paul’s words, we do what we don’t want to do, and we don’t do what we want to do. In the words of the spiritual, our souls are sin-sick.

I would like to spend a little time in contemplation of this. I’m going to play a video of the King’s College Choir singing Pablo Casals’s “O vos omnes.” The words are from Lamentations 1:12, but sung in Latin:

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?  
Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow.

Let me suggest you consider the ways in which you are mourning. If you like, I’ll give some time for us to share when the music completes.

(Play) King’s College Choir sings Pablo Casals “O vos omnes”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RlcAqb-h98A>

(Time for sharing)

Jesus came as the Man of Sorrows, as described in Isaiah 53. And he comes to bring his blessing to any who mourn: those who mourn their loved ones, the loss of meaning, the sinfulness we feel before God.

He promises to comfort us. “I pray the Father, and he will give you another comforter, an advocate to be with you until the end of the age.” He promises us that he will, at some point exchange our sorrow for laughter.

Sometimes we are the rich man in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Let us strip off the excesses of this age, and begin to mourn the real poverty of our situation and the direness of our state. Sometimes we are Lazarus in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Let us be glad for the comfort and promises of God:

Because the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God belongs to such as you. Welcome to the kingdom.

**Addendum**

Irenaeus of Lyons wrote, in his book *Against Heresies*, “the glory of God is a human fully alive.” When we mourn deeply, we realize three things. First, to mourn deeply and to accept that we are mourning so deeply is to be more fully alive. This, in itself, is a comfort and consolation. Second, we realized how deeply we *can* feel. If we can mourn so deeply, we will (at another time and in other circumstances) feel joy just as deeply. If we can mourn so deeply, we can (at another time and in other circumstances) feel contentment, or gratitude, or interest, or hope. Third, we can accept that God has made us this way: we are human being with deep emotions for which we need not apologize; in fact, we participate in the glory of God.

We may be called to accompany others as they mourn. As we do so, we may see others becoming more fully alive as they mourn, as they increase their capacity to feel deeply, as they understand themselves as creatures with emotions which glorify God. Rather than necessarily being drained by the emotional burden of their mourning, or defensively cutting ourselves off from bearing their emotional pain, we can rejoice in, and be comforted by, the work of God in their lives.

1. Warren, David. “Blessed are they that mourn,” *The Catholic Thing*, March 8, 2004. <https://www.thecatholicthing.org/2014/03/08/blessed-are-they-that-mourn/> Accessed May, 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)