

West Branch Friends Meeting  
March 19, 2017  
Sue McCracken, Pastor  
“Meek and Mild? Really?!”

Scripture: Matthew 5:1-5

As we continue through this season of Lent, marching on toward Easter, I hope it's been a time when we've contemplated ways in which we might travel a bit further while on this spiritual journey of ours. And I hope that considering Jesus' teachings in the beatitudes is helping us figure out ways to be happy by being poor in spirit to enable us to reside in the Kingdom of God here on earth, and to claim the promise of God's comfort in our sorrow. This week's key to happiness is probably one of the most misunderstood of all the beatitudes.

***“Blessed (or happy) are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”***

Starting back in the 1950's, a religious belief called 'Prosperity Gospel' or 'Health and Wealth Gospel' began to be a popular way to think of God and scripture. By the 1980's, thanks to televangelism, there were a number of famous pastors whose messages were quite simple: God wants Christians to be healthy and wealthy. Now the pathway to this health and wealth, according to these pastors, is to simply donate money (preferably to the televangelist), visualize yourself being well and rich, and positively confess that this is God's will and you are accepting and believing it will happen.

I never really agreed with this way of thinking because I just couldn't align it with Jesus' teachings, but I could name some very famous preachers who are still today espousing this idea and, some of the rationale comes from this beatitude, which promises we will inherit the earth and everything in it. So let's try and figure out what Jesus meant with this key to happiness.

An inheritance is something given to us. I'm sure some of you have received an inheritance during your lifetime, but sometimes there are conditions attached. I can remember thinking about the 'reading of certain wills' that caused a lot of suspense (and sometimes anguish)

when the family was gathered to hear what the loved one had left them. Sometimes the conditions of the inheritance are spelled out in advance: you have to be a certain age to receive it, or perform certain tasks. I also remember one of my friends telling me about her aunt's will which stipulated the money left to her siblings had to be used in certain, documented ways that indicated a need for the money.

But according to this beatitude, our inheritance is the earth – everything we need to be happy! With only one condition: meekness! So the first problem is trying to figure out exactly what meekness involves. And we also have to consider the history of Jesus' time when the Roman Empire placed enormous stock in power, honor, and status. For Jesus to tell his often poor, downtrodden followers that being meek – or even using the translation of 'powerless' - would have been considered a revolutionary idea to this group of people living in a Roman occupied land.

And I'm thinking it might be just as revolutionary an idea today as it was in Jesus time. We often hear many in this country longing for America to be the most powerful country on the earth.

Most of us would not select 'meek' as a desired personality trait! Being meek sounds ordinary, weak. It kind of reminds me of Wimpy in the old Popeye cartoons. If you're my age or older, you may remember Wimpy as the character who always wore a derby, smoked a cigar, and had a walrus mustache. He would come to the diner and say, "I'll gladly pay you Tuesday for a hamburger today!" But whenever Brutus (who was kind of a bully) would mix it up with Popeye, Wimpy would hide behind the counter. And that's what the word meek sometimes reminds us of.

When some people read this beatitude, they are thinking 'surely Jesus must have meant, "How happy are the strong, for they shall take over the world!" or, "How happy are the powerful, or the ruthless, the self-sufficient, the proud, for they will grab control of the earth!" But no, in fact, meek is actually just the opposite of the 'me-generation.' I will have to admit that we all have this need to be 'in charge' at times. We're addicted to being perfect and being number one. Listen to these book titles:

Pulling your Own Strings  
Looking out for Number One  
Winning Through Intimidation  
Good to Great  
The Magic of Thinking Big

If you look up the word 'meek' in a Bible dictionary, you might find this reference; "See humility." And I think Jesus gives us the perfect parable to explain humility in Luke 18:9-14 from The Message.

***"He (Jesus) told his next story to some who were complacently pleased with themselves over their moral performance and looked down their noses at the common people: "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax man. The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: 'Oh, God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income." Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, 'God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.'" Jesus commented, "This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face, but if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself."***

Another way of saying this beatitude might be:

***"How happy you are when you give up your self-centered attempt to run your own life, deciding instead to live dependently upon God, for then you will inherit the earth."***

Being meek also calls to mind words like honest, candid, and unpretentious. When unpretentious humility is a product of our faith relationship with God, then our meekness is securely rooted in what God has done and is doing in our lives. This gives us a security that releases us from inferiorities that sometimes cause us to lash out at others, tear down others' character and dreams. When we are delighted to hear of someone else's misfortune, and when we are happy to pass along that news to others, we call it gossip. Gossip, however, has no place in the secure life of one humble enough to always look for the best

in people. Humility is also a spirit of willingness and obedience to let God shape and mold us in the ways we saw Jesus living his life.

If we look around, we can see examples of those possessing meekness. It's our neighbors bringing over food after an illness, or death, our friends who never seems to grow resentful or bitter about anything which life may bring. It's that person we admire because s/he always seems to be concerned about others. It's many of you who I've come to know and see in action. I remember one of the speech pathologists I worked with who probably exhibited meekness as well as anyone I've ever known. I NEVER heard her say a negative thing about any of the students she helped correct their speech issues, nor any of the teachers in our school. She was always positive about everyone she worked with.

A modern translation of this beatitude might read:

***“Happy are the meek who show their reverence to God, who are aware of the needs of others, and who will be there to help and support them.”***

One word of caution, though...meekness doesn't mean we let others take advantage of us. In Matthew 10:11-14, Jesus gives these instructions when sending out his disciples:

***“Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave. As you enter the home, give it your greeting. If the home is deserving, let your peace rest on it; if it is not, let your peace return to you. If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.”***

To get down to specifics, here are some ways we can practice meekness: First of all, we can...

- Accept ourselves
- Like ourselves, be happy with who we are
- Desire to grow
- Expand our horizons
- Choose to not become stagnated on our spiritual journeys

- Read current theologians' books and blogs so we don't become complacent and build a cocoon around ourselves
- We can vow to never be satisfied
- To ask questions
- To test and deepen our faith
- Learn to express emotions – both the joys and sorrows
- Permit others to experience our anguish
- Allow others to celebrate our successes
- Help others feel our compassion for them
- Just be there for others
- Grow into becoming expressive
- Uncork what we too easily bottle up inside us
- Take risks
- Be vulnerable
- Take a chance and say 'I love you'

A servant's heart is the crux of meekness: reticence to assert ourselves **for** ourselves. We can exercise power, but for the benefit of all people, not just ourselves. Jesus invites us to be part of a community. But here's something I read on a blog this past week from a woman who was questioning some 'Christian' attitudes. Her words gave me pause to think about my own meekness. She writes:

***"Please tell me why most "Christians" today are just the opposite of what Jesus describes & also modeled when he lived on Earth. "Christians" I know are arrogant, selfish, treat me poorly because I have little education & clean houses for a living. Seems to me (from my experience) that the more money they make, the more selfish they become yet claim to be "Christians." They seem to only follow verses in the Bible they agree with or, in some cases, have their own interpretation which seems twisted to me."***

So it's always good for me to stop and rate my meekness on, say, a scale of 1-10....and some days it's definitely not as good as others!!

**Here's a suggestion from author and theologian Dallas Willard to help us find ways to show meekness. He writes:**

***“One unusual activity that can be an effective spiritual discipline for those who are used to “the better things in life” is to do grocery shopping, banking, and other business in the poorer areas of the city. This has an immense effect on our understanding of and behavior toward our neighbors—both rich and poor—and upon our understanding of what it is to love and care for our fellow human beings.”***

And what is the reward for meekness? The earth. Not just the physical earth, but all the beautiful experiences that life affords us while on this earth. It’s a life that is balanced, free to accept God’s love and free to give that love to others.

And finally, a quote from Quaker Phil Gulley who writes, *“Evil has many branches but only one root – the belief in our superiority and the other’s inferiority.”*

***Happy are the meek....the humble....for then the world and a life of happiness is ours!***