



North Shore
Congregational
Church

FOX POINT, WI

From the Pulpit...

“Blessed Are the Transgressors...”

Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching

John 8: 2-11; Luke 18: 9-14

July 6, 2025

So, I tried to come up with some sort of a pithy title for this summer series that we are doing, but I never really got there. This is week two, however, of looking at those familiar words of the Beatitudes through the lens of the parables. Jesus used those parables to help convey deeper meaning to his listeners, so we’re exploring how that framework can help us build renewed and/or fresh understandings of these Beatitudes in our lives. Today, we are looking at the second of the Beatitudes, from Matthew 5:4, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.” To set the stage, however, I want to dig into our parable of the day – that of the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector from Luke 18.

[Jesus] also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Luke 18: 9-14)

Some of you may recall that this is one of my favorites of all of Jesus’ Parables, but we will come back to that in a bit. First, however, I came across a Buddhist notion, just this past week, about the two arrows. The concept behind the two arrows is the sequential damage of a harmful event. The first arrow is the event itself – the shot we take in life. There is harm, and hurt, and all number of challenges that may emerge from that initial event. The second arrow, however, is the mental and emotional anguish that stems from that initial event. The implication behind this concept in Buddhism, then, is that this second arrow is often as, if not even more, painful than the first. Said another way, what we do in our hearts and minds in the wake of a harmful event can often lead to even more pain and strife than did the event itself. And that, I want to suggest, is a reality to which our Beatitude of the day speaks in a particularly meaningful way.

So, back to our parable and our Beatitude...

“Blessed are those who mourn,” Jesus says, *“for they will be comforted.”* This one seems pretty straightforward. The very same day that I was putting words to the page for this message, I was meeting with Donna Ritke to explore plans for a memorial service for her father that is set to take place right at the beginning of August. My entire focus in such moment is precisely what we tend to read into this Beatitude. To a gathering of family and friends who are grieving the loss of a loved one – who are mourning – I am seeking to bring the blessings and comfort of God’s hope, God’s promise, and God’s love. We pray. We read Romans 8, John 14 and Psalm 23. We share remembrances. We sing songs. And, throughout it all, it is my ardent prayer that somehow I might serve a small part in bringing God’s comfort to their mourning.

I think we do ourselves a disservice, however, when we pigeon-hole God’s blessings in a way that ignores the breadth of our mourning in life. We grieve about so much more than death. We grieve the loss of a job or the breakdown of a relationship. We grieve about the departure of our children and the relative emptiness of our homes. We grieve over the decline of our health and injuries or illness that reduce our function and engagement in life. We grieve in so many ways about so many things, and this blessing of God’s comfort is proclaimed in this Beatitude to each and every one of those ‘second arrows’ of mourning that can overtake our hearts and even our lives. No matter what the grief – no matter the source of our mourning – God’s comfort is there to be claimed. The grief I think we overlook more than any other, however, is the grief we know in the wake of those moments of human frailty in which that first arrow was one we shot.

Now, stick with me... It was fascinating to me to look into this Beatitude a bit and to find that the word we translate as ‘mourn’ very well might have a specific connotation to it. The word ‘penthouentes’ in Greek is typically translated as those who ‘mourn,’ but there is an implication of remorse and penitence to that word that is lost when you translate it as a more general sense of grief. When we hear the word ‘mourn,’ we think of grieving over death. When you consider mourning with a sentiment of remorse and penitence, however, you unveil an entirely different concept. The Amplified Bible, which is a translation that seeks to augment the individual words with a deeper understanding of their meaning in context, has an interesting translation of this passage. In the Amplified Bible, the first half of Matthew 5:4 reads, ‘Blessed are those who mourn [over their sins and repent].’

That’s intriguing enough on its own, but let’s look at the second half of the statement. ‘Blessed are those who mourn [over their sins and repent], for they will be comforted.’ Now, this is a fascinating word, as it only shows up one time in all of the Bible – right here. The root of the word, however, is ‘paraklete,’ which is the same word that is used throughout the New Testament to describe the Holy Spirit. The key to consider, however, is that there is an invitational notion of this word – of being beckoned to the side of God for that help and support (as one would receive through the work of the Spirit). So, one could express what we’re talking about here in Matthew 5:4 as, ‘Blessed are those who mourn over their sins and repent, for they will be invited to God’s comfort and help.’

Now, let’s turn back to our parable. We have these two men who enter into the temple to pray. The Pharisee – that teacher of the law who is so respected for his dedication to the rules and regulations of faithful living – stands before God with his own 1st century form of a humble-brag as he ‘thanks’ God for all of the wonderful things this man is and does. Way back behind him,

however, cowering behind one of those pillars, we have that Tax Collector – the one who made his living by swindling others – and he’s staring the ground, keeping his distance, beating his chest, and crying out ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ Sound familiar? *‘Blessed are those who mourn their sins and repent.’* Jesus goes on, in the parable, *“I tell you, this man went down to his home justified.” ‘For they will be invited to God’s comfort and help.’*

When we consider that particular implication of the word ‘penthountes’ in our Beatitude, we can’t help but see that man from our parable reflected in that promise! That tax collector, cowering in the corner and beating his chest as he cries out in contrition is, without question, the one in this story who is mourning his sins and repenting. And who is the one who goes home justified? Who is the one invited to God’s side for comfort and help? He is!

Sometimes, we have no control over that first arrow. Sometimes it is the actions of the others or life’s randomness itself that fires them in our direction – and there’s nothing we can do about that. Sometimes, however, that first arrow is the one we shot, and the second is the one we shoot ourselves with as we delve into the grief and mourning that stems from our remorse and regret. In this Beatitude, however, I think Jesus is speaking to all of it.

We grieve and mourn so many things for so many reasons. We grieve the loss of a job or the breakdown of a relationship. We grieve about the departure of our children and the relative emptiness of our homes. We grieve over the decline of our health and injuries or illness that reduce our function and engagement in life. We grieve in so many ways about so many things, and this blessing of God’s comfort is proclaimed in this Beatitude to each and every one of those ‘second arrows’ of mourning that can overtake our hearts and even our lives. One of those blessings, however, is the one we see in that parable – the very moment of that grief-stricken tax collector, enveloped in the pain of his own errant ways, being the one who is called to God’s side for comfort and consolation.

‘Blessed are those who mourn over their sins and repent, for they will be invited to God’s comfort and help.’ We are blessed when we mourn – in all those ways that we mourn – because we will be comforted. I think it’s worth being reminded now and then, however, that this very blessing extends all the way to that grief that is spawned by our most errant of days, as that is where the grace of God calls out to invite us to his side for comfort, for forgiveness, and for help.