

St. Paul: On The Same page

01.26.14 Epiphany 4a

Day One: Micah 6:1-8

With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

What is the biggest sacrifice you've ever made? Perhaps you gave up a promising career to raise a family. Maybe you gave up a promotion to spend time with family, or you sacrificed to put your kids through college.

What have you sacrificed for the sake of your faith? Did you once give up chocolate for Lent? Perhaps you have changed many things in your life as a result of your faith, and some days those sacrifices feel heavy.

We often feel we are giving up so much. Husbands and wives talk about the sacrifices they made for each other, and yet when they were

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God..."

1Corinthians 1:18

married they promised their very bodies to one another.

This is the very gift that God desires to give us. His sacrifice is much greater than ours because he has so much more to give. But he desired to give it all for us, his whole self. We might give him a gift, but God has given us his child, his Son. We might give him some of our time, but God has given to us eternity!

What sacrifice of thanksgiving might you offer today?

Prayer: *Father, I sometimes hesitate to put my offering in the plate, but you never hesitated to send your Son to the cross for my sake. Lord, take my life, and let it be a pleasing offering to you. Amen.*

Day Two: 1 Cor 1:18-31

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

Your brain comprises only 3% of your body's weight, but it uses up 20% of your body's energy. That's why you can't think well when you're tired!

We all wish that we could be brilliant, know the answers to things, and especially that we could remember all the things we keep forgetting. Poul Anderson, in his science-fiction novel *Brain Wave*, imagined that for centuries our planet had been passing through an area of galactic radiation that kept us from using all of our brain's ability. He wrote his story about what might happen if we could all suddenly think like geniuses.

Everyone could understand calculus and quantum physics. Everyone had photographic memories. Cures were quickly discovered for all the world's illnesses and science advanced by leaps and bounds.

And yet, people still hated each other. They were still envious, bitter, sullen, angry, depressed, and lonely. Great knowledge and skill did not bring great contentment and happiness. On the contrary, without humility and love, without mercy, brilliance brought only grief.

Most of us would love to be smarter, to speak several languages, to know more things. But Paul says that God has given us something much better. He has given us the foolishness of Christ – a love that leads to death by crucifixion. But a love that leads through death to a new life.

God's power, he tells Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, is made perfect in our weakness.

Prayer: *O Lord, I want every one to think that I am great. But help me to live so that they will all see how great YOU are. Amen.*

Day Three: Matthew 5:1-12

[Jesus] said: "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 be shown 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 because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Beatitudes are a very hard part of Scripture to teach. Most sermons on these verses seem nagging and moralizing. "You ought to be more generous. You should be meek and humble. You should be a peacemaker and you should live a more righteous life." How often would you want to hear messages like that?!

Worse yet, these well known and beautiful verses are

beautiful are what non-believers think Christians are supposed to look like. Meek and mild, loving and pure, holy and kind. But we're not!

Finally, many people teach that these verses are a promise. If you just do these things you'll be happy. One author calls them "The Be-Happy Attitudes." But we always fail, and we end up more unhappy than ever.

The Beatitudes seem soft and kind, but they are really words of the Law. They describe the ultimate in what it means to be in harmony with God. And who can do that???

Only one. Only Jesus. These words describe how we should be – but they describe better how Jesus IS, and how he can shape us to be as we grow up into him.

We are NOT perfect as these words describe, but for Jesus' sake we ARE blessed because of his perfection.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you possess the kingdom of heaven. You are the one who has seen God. You are the one who has victory over sin and death. Lord, it was for me that you suffered all these things. Let me share in your joy. Amen.*

Day Four:

What is a blessing?

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

One way to translate the word makarios (from the Gospel lesson) is “blessed.” Another way is “happy.” As yesterday’s devotion mentioned, one pastor even wrote a book about what he called “the Be-Happy-Attitudes.” But what does it mean to be happy?

Watch little children for a hour or two. They seem to have switches for on and off, for loud and soft, for very happy and for weeping and wailing. They have fewer settings in between.

One moment a child can be excited and happy, and the next moment they can be devastated and in despair, crying their eyes out.

As we grow up our moods are tempered. We are not so often shouting for joy, but we are also not very often weeping and grieving. It’s not just that we conceal our feelings, but that we have many more feelings than we had before, and we feel them all at once.

We might be happy when we open a gift from a friend, and at the same time feel a deep sense of gratitude, of contentment, or of awe that someone else would care so much for us. We might be recalling the many years of our friendship and the ups and downs we’ve shared – all of those feelings aroused by a simple object in gift paper.

Deeper happiness is the result of more than having money, or health, or physical pleasure. In the Bible, this is what the word “blessed” is used to describe. It is not just a feeling. It is the state of being in a harmonious relationship with God – a life that brings happiness, but which also brings many feelings that we cannot even put into words.

When the pastor says, “The Lord bless you and keep you,” what do you think he is praying for? When you say to someone you love, “God bless you,” what are you praying for them? These are the things God desires for you!

Prayer: *Father, let me be a blessing, just as you have blessed me. Teach me to share the joy and love you have poured out on me. Amen.*