

- 1) When we pronounce today's key word from Matthew's Gospel as **BLESS-ED**,
the sheer musicality of the sound is all but mesmerizing—*Ah, they are BLESS-ED*
When you pronounce it **BLESSED**, however, that can prompt a troubling question:
Are the BEATITUDES merely PLATITUDES?
If we stop to consider the actual situations of those whom Jesus calls **BLESSED**;
it can provoke a two-word response: **GET REAL!**
(Or a three-word response: **DON'T WE WISH!**)
Who **ARE** these, exactly, who are **BLESSED** by Jesus? Let's pass a few in review:
 - The "poor in spirit"—those who know they don't have their stuff together
 - Those who "mourn"—who, when they see the world's suffering, refuse to be consoled
 - Those who yearn for justice—and all but starve for lack of it.
 - Those who take it on the chin, again and again, to defend what's unpopular but right.At best, these Beatitudes sound like ideals worthy but unreachable, well-meant but impractical.
At worst, the Beatitudes sound like what philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche
despised and dismissed as expressions of **HERD MORALITY**—
spiteful, self-serving efforts by the weak
to trash and muzzle the creativity of the strong.
The meek shall inherit the earth?—try again—*it's not the earth the meek inherit, it's the dirt.*
- 2) It's surely true that most of those who heard Jesus speak
would have seen themselves as seriously oppressed—with good reason.
Economically squeezed, socially constricted, politically overwhelmed, physically threatened—
His listeners would readily have heard the words of Jesus as directly addressed to them.
But words to what purpose, words for what good?
Granted the conditions under which those listeners struggle:
if the Beatitudes are meant as comforting—they're cold comfort, indeed—**YEAH, RIGHT!**
understood as the guarantee of a rosy future—they're highly unlikely—**NOT GONNA HAPPEN!**
if the Beatitudes are intended as moral demands—they're impossible—**JUST CAN'T DO IT!**
What **WAS** Jesus up to with His Beatitudes, then and there?
Why do we keep listening to them here and now?
- 3) Maybe, both then and there, and here and now, whatever we think about them,
the Beatitudes attract our attention
not only because they seem so at odds with the way the world is;
but also because they seem so odd as declarations all by themselves.
We might as well just name it, right up front: The **BEATITUDES** are really **ODD**.

- Here is Oddity Number One—

The BEATITUDES continually go back and forth between the present and the future—

Blessed ARE the pure in heart, for they WILL see God.

Blessed ARE the merciful, for they WILL obtain mercy.

These and the other Beatitudes are bundled together between the first and the last—

Blessed ARE the poor in spirit and the persecuted, for theirs IS the Kingdom of Heaven.

The whole series—all eight Beatitudes—

they conclude with an even more direct address by Jesus to his listeners:

Blessed ARE YOU when reviled, persecuted falsely for my sake.

Rejoice—your reward IS great in heaven.

Again, and again, back and forth, bold claims about blessings that ALREADY are.

But those dubious assertions of present fact are continually based

on bold proclamations of things that are NOT YET, but WILL BE.

Let that sink in for a minute:

The Beatitudes are not predictions about the future, based on evidence IN the present.

The Beatitudes are—evidence to the contrary—declarations ABOUT the present

based on what thus far hasn't even HAPPENED—

but which still somehow creates and sustains what IS ALREADY, here and now.

This continual Beatitude interplay of past and future—is that ODD, or WHAT?

- Here is Oddity Number Two—a recurring refrain about “the Kingdom of Heaven.”

But a Kingdom that is NOT an escape from the world

into some far off “somewhere, over the rainbow, way up high”.

NO, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Reign of God,

the Community of Christ, created and convened by God's Commonwealth Covenant—

this Kingdom of Heaven is described in terms that are, literally, “down to earth”.

The Kingdom of Heaven, come on earth—How ODD is THAT?

- And here is Oddity Number Three:

All these “YOU ARE” Beatitudes are pronounced,

not because of how great and good WE are, but because of who GOD is;

and because God is strategically investing God's own Being

in a Beloved Community of which we are a part.

And, what's more, God is doing that HERE and NOW in a way that is TOTALLY at ODDS

with how power politics as usual meets our eyes day after day—

power plays that captivate our attention and frame our vision.

In other words (and in a word), the Beatitudes aren't just platitudes, they are absurd—

unless, of course, they are the way that God intends the world to be—

a way that turns the world of conventional wisdom totally on its head.

4) To the church in Corinth, a community, like our society,

driven and divided by intractable infighting—

to the Corinthian Christians, St. Paul proclaims, unequivocally and unashamedly,

what seems utter foolishness—God's *secret and hidden wisdom*—

A wisdom, about which the world's powerbrokers do not have a clue—

(QUOTE): *what no eye has seen, or ear heard, nor human heart conceived—
but what God has prepared for those who love Him.*

5) *You ARE the world's salt; you ARE the world's light—Jesus says; SO—just BE who you ARE.
For GOD's sake, for YOUR sake, for the sake of a world that depends for ITS life
on the flavoring and preserving life, the illuminating and enlightening life
that God pours into you—*

For God's sake, for your sake, for the sake of the world, Jesus urges,

don't let yourself be any less than who you are created and empowered to be.

Imagine what it would have been like for Jesus's first listeners to hear words like that.

Appearances notwithstanding, YOU are BLESSED—you are strategically positioned.

That, by the way, is what the word BLESSED means at its core—

NOT necessarily "happy," certainly not "lucky," and definitely not "oh so deserving."

You are BLESSED, says Jesus.

*In challenging, seemingly totally vulnerable social, economic, and political conditions,
you are STRATEGICALLY POSITIONED to bring God's sure and certain future
into the world's fragile, broken present.*

*You do this, says Jesus, as unassuming single-minded peacemakers, justice seekers,
mercy bringers—agents of Divine Energy, children of God.*

*You do this, says Jesus, as those who can operate freely,
unfazed and unfettered by the blow back and the push back
of all the world's Machiavelli's, all the world's Nietzsche's,
all the world's merchants of power.*

Imagine what it must have BEEN like to hear such a word from Jesus, then and there.

Imagine what it will BE like, here and now, when,

as Covenant Companions in the Commonwealth of God, we boldly claim for ourselves
that Holy Oddness, that strategic positioning, that BEATITUDE.

Claim that BLESSING, not for ourselves alone,

but on behalf of, and for the sake of the world that God made,

the world that God loves, the world God fully intends to redeem.