

Monday Quotes



Grain

“I can count on the fingers of one hand the number of times that I have heard a sermon on the meaning of religion, of Christianity, to the man [sic] who stands with his back against the wall. It is urgent that my meaning be crystal clear. The masses of men [sic] live with their backs constantly against the wall. They are the poor, the disinherited, the dispossessed. What does our religion say to them? The issue is not what it counsels them to do for others whose needs may be greater, but what religion offers to meet their own needs.” –Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*.

Field

5When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. ²Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ³“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. ⁵“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. ⁶“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. ⁷“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. ⁸“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. ⁹“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. ¹⁰“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:1-12

Thoughts by Reverend Peter Heide, Baraboo, WI

I first remember studying the beatitudes in Confirmation Class in 1967. These blessings were presented as an assurance of our place in God’s kingdom and a lifestyle to aspire to. We were to see ourselves in each of these blessings and although some of the blessings seemed ambiguous, they helped us understand that everything in life was going to be okay. Since those days, I have come to understand these blessings in new ways. I have learned that they are the core of the new community that Jesus is building, a manifesto for the Christian life. And more recently, I have begun to see an even more radical quality in these words.

In this week’s reading we see Jesus walking in the wilderness when a crowd seemingly appears out of nowhere. Yet, if we look back just a few verses (4:23ff) the followers of Jesus are named. Then we realize who Jesus addresses with these words of blessing. Those gathered are the disinherited of Jesus’ time—the sick, the diseased, the demonically possessed, the epileptics, and the paralytics. Jesus is doing something that few have talked about—he begins his ministry with a sermon of resurrection! He raises the poor in spirit (those whom the evil spirits have overpowered), those who mourn their place in life, those who are landless, those who hunger and thirst for justice, those who can respond to their own life situation with mercy toward others (their oppressors especially), for the pure in heart (who get in “good trouble”), for the peacemakers (who work for equity without vengeful violence).

Jesus raises these socially dead: the poor, the disabled, the forgotten, disinherited and dispossessed, into the new community of equitable living. He blesses (recognizes) them as being valued members of the heavenly kingdom which is not a then-and-there potentiality. Jesus is speaking of the possibility of the world we live in today. While it is not the reality of the world we live in, it is the vision of the world we could be living in. In the words of Martin Luther King, Jr., “I have a dream.”

As we struggle for God’s justice in the world, know that persecution may mean that we are on the right path. Indeed, if or when you live with your back against the wall, know God’s recognizing blessing. And whenever your back is not against the wall, endeavor to extend Jesus’ resurrection work. Happy Monday!

Find all Monday Quotes at loppw.org/monday-quotes-other-reflections

Many Blessings upon you,
Pastor Peter Heide